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STRINDBERG THE MAN

STRINDBERG THE MAN

BY

GUSTAF UDDGREN

Translated from the Swedish

BY

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INTRODUCTION

There are two distinct ways in which to deal with genius and the works of genius: The old and the new.

The old method may be characterized as the descriptive. It is, generally speaking, negative. It occupies itself mainly with the conscious motives and the external phases of the artist and his life and gives a more or less literal interpretation of his creation. From an historical point of view the descriptive method has its own peculiar value; from the psycho-analytic viewpoint it is less meritorious, since it adds but little, if anything, to the deeper understanding of the creative mind.

The new or interpretative method is based on psychology. It is positive. It deals exclusively with man's unconscious motivation as the source and main-spring of works of art of whatever kind and independent of time and locality. Thus while the descriptive method accepts at its face value the work of genius, the new or psycho-analytic method penetrates into the lower strata of the Unconscious in order to find the key to the cryptic message which is indelibly though always illegibly written in large letters on every work of art.

Gustaf Uddgren's *Strindberg The Man* (En ny bok om Strindberg) is not a psycho-analytic interpretation of Strindberg in the true sense of the term. It is rather descriptive with a strong analytic tendency. As a matter of fact, it contains a number of elements of such general

interest as to justify the translator's ambition of rendering the work accessible to the English speaking public.

It constitutes the unpretentious message in the form of biography and reminiscence of one of those relatively few and highly favored individuals who can lay claim to a certain amount of intimate personal contact with the great Swedish author. Furthermore, Gustaf Uddgren possesses such a clear insight into and so profound an appreciation of the complex problems with which Strindberg wrestled unceasingly all his life, as to be entitled to a hearing abroad as well as at home.

The book affords an excellent general survey of the many-sided, turbulent life and activities of Sweden's foremost author. Here we meet the juvenile poet and indomitable revolter such as he appeared to the people of the seventies; the so-called misogynist who in the eighties caused a world-wide sensation with his *Married,* his novels, autobiography and naturalistic plays; the wandering scientist, acid psycho-analyst, mystic and paranoiac of the nineties who rises out of his Dantesque Inferno, like the bird Phoenix from his ashes, to produce over a score of dramas—historical, transcendental, social —of such unprecedented excellence as to compare favorably with the greatest dramatic monuments of all times—the Shakespearian. We follow him to his native land after long years of exile on the Continent only to find him rejected, hated and harassed by his own. And finally we retire with him to the Blue Tower where he spends his declining years like a hermit until death claims him on the 14th of May, 1912.

The chapters containing Uddgren's straightforward, unadorned account of his several interviews with Strindberg in Germany, France and Sweden are not only highly interesting from an historical point of view, but shed a great deal of new light upon the complex psychic life and personality of the poet and reformer.

Uddgren's broad, sympathetic views and simplicity of presentation cannot help producing a tonic effect upon the reader when juxtaposited with the intolerance and the depression wrought by the distortion of facts, malicious attacks, meaningless bombast and glittering generalities of some of the self-appointed high priests of Strindberg criticism on both sides of the Atlantic.

With the exception of Lind af Hageby, Hermann Esswein, Emil Schering and Drs. Schleich and Landquist, the translator knows of no other writer who seems so well qualified to discuss Strindberg's extraordinary life and immortal achievements as the author of this little volume. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the book will be welcomed by all students of Strindberg, and that it may fall into the hands of many of those whose knowledge of a great and good man is limited to the glaring misrepresentations, wilful or otherwise, of that stubbornly narrow-minded and vociferous clique of reactionaries who have justly been branded with the fitting epithet *of eagle-eating monkeys.*

A. J. U.

Philadelphia, Pa.
May 1920.

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STRINDBERG THE MAN

CHAPTER I.

Strindberg—The Juvenile Poet and Revolter

I KNEW Strindberg long before I met him. All of that generation which was young during the latter part of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, was carried away by the poet who wrote *Master Olof* and who had raged in *The Red Room.*

To us he was the reawakening of the Swedish spirit of literature and art. We had been terrified at the greatness to which the two Norwegian giants Ibsen and Björnson had attained and we felt almost ashamed that Sweden at this time could not show a single great man.

Then Strindberg came. He had been among us for a long time, although we had not known of his presence. When he came, all the young blood that had any vitality, joined him. Already, at the age of twenty-three, he had produced such a great work as *Master Olof,* the first great masterpiece of Swedish dramatic art—rich in youthful fire and turbulent ideas—and besides, so Swedish through and through that we were justified in commencing to believe in old Sweden once more. For in spite of the fact that we were young, we had already had an opportunity to see through the empty bombast with which the older writers tried to entice us and thus condemn us to the same inactivity into which they themselves had fallen.

We knew something about that school of suffering which Strindberg had passed through in his youth. This fact made him twice as dear to us. We sent our glowing hatred up to Stockholm, to its old fogies of the press who had received his youthful but manly words with the scoffs and sneers of impotence and had refused him that recognition which every promising young poet needs in order to grow big and strong and withstand the storms which are sure to rage about him upon the mountain top. And we placed ourselves wholly on his side when, after years of insidious persecution—during which he had been the cheerful, generous giver—he took up his position of defense and finally was forced to attack in person those who refused to recognize him.

What ecstasy did he not create in our young hearts when alone he attacked the generally unsatisfactory conditions round about us! This was something for a young generation to behold. To cut down the enemy that grew like weeds in the midst of our acres and to fight great battles with them, seemed to us of greater consequence than all the warring expeditions of the Gustavians on the plains of Germany or the pursuit of chimeras in the deserts of Russia.

The teacher who believes that the young accept without discrimination all the manipulated historical expositions with which they are to be educated so as to incline towards one side or the other, is thoroughly mistaken. The young on the contrary have a great intuitive ability to see through what is purposely falsified, and when their suspicion has once been awakened, they tear to shreds

the whole fabric of lies with a violence which can be modified only in the course of years and which later on develops—on the part of the Philistine head of the family—into a complete satisfaction with everything that exists.

This Strindberg, the poet, who was forced to give up his journey to *Parnassus* in order to identify himself with a pioneer movement, we loved. Continually we saw him before us in the symbolic picture which Carl Larsson[1] had furnished as a title-page vignette to Strindberg's collected juvenile works: *In the Spring-Time.* In it there is a young Titan with sorrowful eyes, painfully drawn mouth, a lion's mane above the mighty brow, and a large thorn pointing towards the aching head.

The poet of the sharp thorn—pointing as it were from a crown of thorns directly towards his creative brain—that was the juvenile image of Strindberg which etched itself more indelibly than all others on the minds of those who were young at that time. All the contemporaries to whom I have spoken of this, once had the same visual sensation of him who aroused us out of our slumber.

Yes, he had brought life to us. For we had all gone astray in the desert where we had got sand into our throats instead of water and were on the point of dying with thirst. About fifteen years earlier, Strindberg had passed through the throes of adolescence in which we now were, and his strong intuition had guided him out of the desert, and when we saw him for the first time, he was standing at the boundary of the ever verdant

[1] A famous Swedish artist, (1853-1919).

land with a gesture full of promise and new happiness, pointing out the way for us.

We had passed through the same horrible awakening as Strindberg. With all the ecstasy of youth, we had approached what we considered the highest ideal. We had been told from childhood that nobody can be a good individual without religion, and since youth is naïve enough to believe itself goodness personified, we had all done our level best to penetrate deeper and deeper into that treasury of religion which is hidden from view by innumerable veils.

We had had the same experiences as Strindberg, but when we believed we had reached our goal, when it seemed as though the last veil would be drawn aside, then everything burst like the iridescent soap-bubble, and there we stood viewing it all from the wrong side.

His despair was ours, and every word he spoke was received by us like fresh spring water which brought us to life again.

What did we care that the so-called literary critique in the capital annihilated everything he wrote? We had entered through the lofty portal of poetic creation; we had followed his progress line for line in the characters of *Master Olof* and *Gerdt the Printer.* And we had learned how to love this Master Olof who made the walls of the old, crumbling temple fall in order to make room for a greater, freer, and more worthy structure. We loved our new Swedish master just as highly as we loved the gentle Master of Galilee.

Already the introduction to *Master Olof* had for us the

beauty of revelation and recalled to us the sagas which we had read in our youth. Master Olof's play with the two disciples whose parts in a religious drama he is rehearsing, was to us the harbinger of that new spring of which the author gave us the presentiment. We had been seized with a hatred of the religion in which we had been deceived, but we still retained that strong religious sentiment which quest and search had produced, and Strindberg's words fell into a soil that was predisposed to receive them.

Not until many years afterwards when I saw *Master Olof* on the stage did I notice that my love of the play had been so great as to prevent me from fully grasping the significance of the closing scenes of the drama. My belief in the Swedish reformer[1] had been so unlimited as to force me to overlook those traits of weakness which the poet had permitted to remain in him in order that he might be completely human.

The next work of Strindberg that came to us down there in the country was *The Red Room.* It was preceded by a rumor of excessive "redness," the consequence of which was that we, the young, shrank for a time from reading it, in spite of the fact that we considered ourselves as red as it was possible to be.

And so when we read *The Red Room,* we felt as if a new warmth streamed into our veins. Our pulses throbbed more vigorously, and the whole description became enshrouded in a sort of red mist. And that was

[1] Olaus Petri (Master Olof), Swedish divine and reformer, (1493-1552).

not on account of it being politically so red, since we in the country never had had any respect for bureaucratic Stockholm against which Strindberg directed his biting satire, but rather on account of the violent indignation which these initial clashes with life had aroused in the breast of the young poet.

In *Master Olof* he had as yet been on the great main road which seems to lead directly up to the heights. With *The Red Room* he had turned in on a by-path which meandered among the underbrush. He had thrown himself into the opposition and revolted against this provincialistic community which tried to keep him down and force him to turn away from the lofty *genre* of composition whose rhythm echoed in *Master Olof*.

The poet who revolted against his entire surroundings, whose indignation gave him a courage so great that not even the highest fortress-tower of tradition frightened him, the poet with the thorn pointing towards his head—we could not but love and admire, we who were young at that time.

Is it to be wondered at that we stuck to him through thick and thin? That we ourselves became revolters, each in his own little circle?

Besides this there were in *The Red Room* glorious descriptions of Bohemian life which for all time to come opened our eyes to the beauty of a life led in such proud simplicity as that of those young artists among their garden plots in the vicinity of Lill-Jans'.[1] These Strindberg stories prevented many of us from making

[1] The beautiful Lill-Jans' woods to the north of the capital.

life a grinding Marathon, and instead sent us on our way in search of an ideal that we considered worthy and noble.

I once heard a prominent Swede declare that the whole trouble with Strindberg was that he had never enjoyed a good, secure family life. No, fortunately he did not; fate never permitted him to enjoy a calm for any length of time, and still less allowed his spirit to be stifled in that vicious atmosphere and in that insincere union of two individuals— who preferably should have shunned one another—which is known as "the good family." On the contrary he did continue to be the same free Bohemian, whether he had a wife in the house or not, and he never enjoyed what we call "society." He always had his knapsack packed and was ready to continue his wanderings.

The beginning of the eighties continually brought us surprises from the hands of Strindberg. We read with admiration *The Secret of the Guild, Sir Bengt's Wife,* and *In the Spring-Time,* but we rejoiced even more at the works in which he continued the intellectual revolution that was the great achievement of his youth.

He revolutionized completely our conception of Swedish history by his work *The Swedish People,* in which he showed us that it was not alone the great names of kings that carried out the great deeds in which our history abounds, but that behind them there stood a people worthy of a much greater admiration.

Strindberg's outline of a cultural history is a patriotic achievement of extraordinary importance. No other book that has come into my hands has awakened such a love for our people as that one book. And it is a love that embraces not only the nobility with the brilliant family names, but also the great nameless masses who in silence have fought all the battles of every day life with a heroism just as great as that which our countrymen developed on the world-famous fields of battle.

Originally Strindberg's *The Swedish People at Home,* was projected on a much larger scale, but the publishers forced him to hurry in order to issue the work, which was published in installments, as soon as possible. Strindberg, therefore, found it necessary to condense it more and more, and in the end he was obliged to style the book *An Outline.* Swedish literature thus lost one of its most monumental works. The foundation is laid, however, and it is to be hoped that the near future may bring forth some historian of cultural progress who in a worthy manner will continue the work which Strindberg began.

The next epoch-making book by Strindberg was his great social satire *The New Kingdom.* It caused great rejoicing among the young, but wrung a cry of horror from all the old-timers.

The Swedish realm, our entire system of government, the all-constitutive bureaucracy, we had been accustomed from childhood on to regard as a kind of divine institution so flawlessly perfect that we had to admire it as a

model for the entire world. The leading men in the province of religion and literature were scarcely less than gods, and it never would have occurred to anyone to approach this Olympus with criticising glances.

And then there came an underrated dramaturgist who not only laid bare a great many flaws in them, but looked at the whole matter from such an elevation that the loftiness disappeared and the proud height of Olympus caved in, until it became as flat as a newly tilled field, and the resplendent temples seemed to be situated in mud-puddles instead of upon the brow of the famous mountain.

The New Kingdom could not have aroused a discussion more animated had it been a new, half intelligible play by Ibsen. We, the young blood, we revelled in the social emancipation to which we had now attained, just as we did in the case of *The Red Room,* which had prepared the way for the younger artists and art theories in the province of literature and painting. The older generation was thoroughly frightened and endeavored to deny the facts with which Strindberg tormented his times. They regarded us as irretrievably lost and heading towards a sad future, where, perhaps, some fine day we would be swallowed up by the earth.

In one respect they were right. It was a hard blow to a young mind to be obliged to tear to shreds, piece by piece, all that had been regarded as the loftiest and the most noble. It is like going through a series of operations and having the old members replaced by new ones.

You are able thus to save a life, but the result is a piece of patch-work with seams *à tort et à travers.*

That Strindberg and his contemporary adolescent generation had to submit to this, was not our fault. We would have preferred to continue in our belief in the old household-gods, but when we noticed that the state of impotent of the preceding generations had given a vigorous start to cancerous diseases in our breasts, what else could we do but put the knife to the abscesses and remove them while it was yet time?

Because Strindberg marched at the head of us as the incorruptibly honest and fearless champion of truth, we had the power to endure the torture of the operations. We had suffered from those afflictions for years, but they were necessary in order that coming generations might be saved. In our case the mental diseases were only in a primary stage at which an operation was still possible; in the next generation, they would perhaps become incurable.

Cutting down everything that he found decaying or withered, Strindberg continued to advance upon the path which ran like a spiral around the mountain up to its summit. When he arrived, he compared the temple structure situated there to Valhalla, and he found that he himself, once a beaming Balder, had been changed into a reviling Loke.[1] It is in his *Poems in Verse and Prose* that we meet him in this guise.

The spirit of the age in general he symbolizes in the

[1] In English: Loki. See Norse, Mythology.

conception *The Gods of Time.* He raises them up to the Valhalla of real *décadence,* a lofty dwelling which reminds one not a little of a certain literary Areopagus with sweetened water in the glasses before them. And after having placed those gods in a proper *milieu à la Offenbach,* he himself stepped into the midst of them like the young giant Loke, horsewhipped them until the strokes of the whip tore open their bodies, and only watched for the right moment to overthrow the whole assembly.

All the gentleness and goodness of the author of *Master Olof* had disappeared. Before us stood a young, spiteful blasphemer whose love of truth and justice forced him to speak as he did.

It was the revolter pure and simple we beheld, the revolter who had raised the banner of rebellion within the sphere of spirit and intellect. And when he raised the banner against hypocrisy and counterfeit gods, how could we but follow him? All the young people of the early eighties who had anything good in them unconditionally went into battle under the colors of this chief. Those who remained at home were the insidious and narrow-minded, who were more intent upon watching the meat-pots (and of stealing some of the meat from those who had hastened to the firing line) than to make sacrifices for a great cause.

We ourselves could not at that time realize the magnitude of the fight nor the significance of the victory which Loke and his youthful forces actually won. But now,

almost a quarter of a century later, anyone that is so inclined can see that it was this bloodless revolution within the intellectual sphere which, after it had caused the collapse of the crumbling temples, prepared a new foundation for the new Sweden, which ever since that time has been erecting new structures for a people whose self-respect is on the point of being aroused.

Without the Strindberg revolution, our nation would still be that invertebrate, lethargic weakling who considered that he was doing enough for the age by dreaming about the boom of the leather-cannon of the seventeenth century and who admired himself while lying on his back declaiming Tegnér's *Charles XII.*

CHAPTER II.

Strindberg—The Misunderstood Knight of the Weaker Sex

IN spite of the fact that so many wise and good words have already been said by others—*e.g.* by Hermann Esswein and John Landquist—about the pretended woman-hater Strindberg, I, too, am obliged to touch on the subject, not in order to produce more evidence to show that Strindberg's hatred of women is a misunderstanding, but because I need this factor also in order to make the characterization of the poet and the man, which I am endeavoring to present by means of these lines, as complete as possible.

Besides questions pertaining to art, religion, and sociology, in which Strindberg had been the spokesman for the young, there was a field in which we all stood face to face with a chaotic confusion *i.e.* things erotic.

At first, like Strindberg himself, we had had to fight clear of the maelstrom of misunderstanding upon which the traditional so-called moral conception is based. After we had succeeded by degrees in arriving at our own conclusion in this matter, always with reference to individual characteristics, we suddenly collided with two great icebergs which checked us and became the cause of new confusion.

These were the contributions to the question by the two great Norwegians Ibsen and Björnson. Ibsen was

the more significant and the more dangerous, for his Nora-morals had laid a very serious hold on all and were, at the time when Strindberg sat down and wrote his *Married,* in a fair way to be accepted as a sort of official individual moral code. Björnson's glove-morals on the other hand fell down almost immediately on account of being absolutely unreasonable.

But the Nora-morals or the "Doll's House cult" thrived, and as it was in a fair way of turning our heads perhaps for a long time to come, the lion woke up in Strindberg, and he considered the time had come when it was his duty to appear in the arena and strike a great blow.

He began his attack by indicating that if the feministic movement of that time was bent on liberating woman in such a way that she would grow more and more like a man, then the movement had strayed from the right path. There must be a difference between man and woman, for if all humanity should become masculine, such a state of affairs could have but one consequence: the downfall of the human race. If woman did not wish to submit to motherhood, the human race naturally could not continue.

Strindberg has a totally different ideal from that of the emancipated mannish woman: the love of the good, cheerful housewife, the object of the husband's and the childrens' love—a woman raised almost to the level of a madonna, but who, because of the treasure she possesses in the home, bows before the mate and supporter of the family.

Strindberg once made the following statement to me: "In Switzerland, where I stayed during the period when *Married* was a burning question, I never felt fully at home. The wives there, as in France, were perfectly free, just like the men, and could choose their lovers according to their own wishes. The *wife-cocotte* is an irrational combination which I never could tolerate. I felt that I was in an entirely different atmosphere when I came to Bavaria, where the men are the determining element in wedlock and the women are obedient and true. Just the return to these old fashioned patriarchal conditions was enough to arouse in me my poetic inspiration which during the latter part of my stay in Switzerland had been nearly dormant."

The fact is that Strindberg had strayed away from himself during the latter part of his sojourn in Switzerland. He published a large number of novels and essays in Swiss and particularly in Austrian dailies and magazines, but they were altogether impersonal and without a sign of the Swedish trait which is so characteristic of everything else he has written. The Strindberg who wrote those novels and articles was a cosmopolitan in whom the Swedish heart had broken down entirely. Neither in contents nor in phraseology is there anything that recalls the poet Strindberg. But as soon as he had settled in Bavaria and found himself in a setting corresponding to the old fashioned Swedish conditions, he rediscovered himself, became just as Swedish as ever before and his productiveness rose so as to form one of the greatest and

richest of periods, the one which begins with *The Father* and ends with *The Dance of Death.*

What lies behind Strindberg's fight against all the outgrowths of the feministic movement is exactly this: he continually clung to the ideal of woman as wife and mother which he had formed in his youth. And what he attacked during the period in which he wrote and defended his work *Married* was just such conditions as are likely to destroy the altogether too unpopular ideal.

What he attacked was *partly* Ibsen's false exposition in *A Doll's House* of man and woman in wedlock and which started a silly discussion about unhappy marriages in general and especially of woman as the one contrahent in wedlock who has been oppressed for centuries; *partly* he directed his weapons against matrimony *under present conditions,* as he himself writes in an interview-preface to the first part of *Married*:

"I have shown that perfect bliss is impossible, I have shown that woman *under present conditions* has often —not always—become a toad on account of her education, I have thus—write it down, Sir—attacked the education of the female, church marriage and the liberty on the part of the men to play the paramour; consequently I have not attacked woman, but rather—write it down, Sir, in large letters—*Present Conditions.*

"Woman does not need my defense. She is the fashion and therefore she is the mistress of the world. And the freedom she now demands is the same freedom demanded by all men. This we must acquire as friends, not as enemies, for as such we will get nothing."

How the author of *Married* in spite of these lucid statements of his could be turned into the apostle of absolute hatred of women, seems to me to be a sleight-of-hand trick of the kind that is rather difficult of explanation. Of course, it is quite clear from what quarter the trick proceeds; but to explain and to prove anything about it conclusively is more difficult.

Strindberg's endeavor to appear as the defender of idealistic womanhood displeased all the emancipationists in skirts or pantaloons who had started the "Doll's House cult" and had set up as their high aim: The emancipation of woman. And, strange to say, it seems to have been the educated element of the nation that had been carried away by this cult, this worship of the *family cocotte,* How many of those who fought bravely against the Ibsen play did not go down on their marrow-bones in face of the perverted cult caused by the very same play?

They did not try to refute Strindberg's logic with counter-proofs and clear arguments. They probably felt that it was rather difficult to argue him off his feet. But they felled the altogether too bold champion by a blow from behind. They declared him an outlaw by christening him *The Woman Hater.*

Everywhere in Sweden during the years next following the lawsuit occasioned by his *Married,* around thousands of coffee pots and with the aid of thousands of foul, tattling tongues, they fixed to the name of Strindberg this uncalled-for epithet; and it became so enduringly fixed that even at the present time, nay, on the very day of Strindberg's death, a thoughtless journalistic

literary light could sit down and use in the obituary of the greatest poet that Sweden has produced, this derogatory term which he ought to have felt to be improper on purely technical grounds in connection with the name of the departed.

Strindberg had, as we have said, a certain purpose in view when he wrote his *A Book about Women.* That purpose he attained only in part. He was able to undermine the Nora-cult so that it collapsed, but to get the feministic movement to progress along lines where it could keep company with reason was an impossibility even for him.

Moreover, a comical incident thwarted the whole purpose of *Married.* A prominent lady took exception to it and ordered an action to be brought against it. This ought to have been directed, of course, against its "immoral tendencies," against the lack of respect with which the author speaks of Her Majesty the Mistress of the world, *i.e.* against those features which ten thousand emancipated housewives had found most objectionable in the book. If that had been done Strindberg would without a doubt have performed a much greater service with his book than he did.

But instead of this, the accusers twisted the whole matter by bringing action against *Married* for defamation of religion. Such a course Strindberg never could have imagined, and it is to this disappointment he refers when he gives vent to his despair in the historical words: "The shot went off, but my gun did not stand it. The pot is bursted."

Strindberg writes in the fourth part of *The Charwoman's Son* (The Author) which was completed in 1886 but not published until 1910, that the celebrated lawsuit was a farce staged by a woman and naturally intended to bring a man (himself) into the lime-light. The action was a comedy badly written by women, and the part which they assigned to Strindberg did not fit him. It proved the wrong one right through. He refused it, but they forced it upon him, as well as a couple of other rôles which he liked even less. He was to be a popular tribune, a religious reformer, a party leader, everything except what he was—an author.

And when the prosecution was all over, it had succeeded in its principal aim. Strindberg was clawed to pieces, unable to work and, from an economic point of view, he was ruined.

But it also had other consequences for the author of *Married*. He had attacked religion, holy matrimony, and emancipated woman. For this he was now to be punished. All that he had written was declared to be immoral, he was no longer the fashionable author, and during the years 1884-1889, while he continued to reside abroad, his enemies succeeded in spreading such a terror about his name that upon his arrival home he felt himself to be an unknown man.

The great popularity which he had once enjoyed was gone. If he had been convicted in the lawsuit over *Married,* there would have been a revolution in his favor. Now he was discharged, dismissed even by young Sweden, the literary party who had arrayed themselves

about him and chosen him as their chief despite the fact that he never had asked them for that honor.

This was their gratitude for his clear and candid statement pertaining to one of the burning questions of the day and for his having chosen his words so that the statement will be valid for long years to come,—probably as long as men and women shall foolishly get into their heads to give one another—before clergyman or magistrate—the rash promise of partnership for life.

In the obscure circle of a provincial town where I sojourned the year when *Married* appeared, I had a splendid opportunity to study the remarkable manner in which Swedish society received the work.

A long time before the book appeared and before its contents became known, it had been condemned unanimously. *The New Kingdom* had not been read in vain. They knew, therefore, how boldly free this social critic was, how little reverence he showed for certain of our time-honored grievances, and they were convinced beforehand that Strindberg would put his foot in it most decidedly, if he actually undertook to discuss such a delicate question as that of woman and marriage.

They knew, therefore, several weeks in advance that *Married* pleaded for nothing less than "free love," the more accidental the better. All ties were to be severed, for the parents must not know to whom their children belonged, and on that account all were to be educated by the state in a national institution for foundlings. Thus parental love was to be blotted out of the world. And the women—well, what their fate might be one

could imagine, when they no longer enjoyed the protection of conjugal ties but instead had to look upon love as their bread and butter. The female sex was destined to form a proletarian class of most despicable creatures, and the last vestige of family life was to be wiped out once for all.

We can imagine what consternation this created in innumerable little homes. Around the family lamp the folks are sitting in an atmosphere which one might almost be justified in calling religious. And then Strindberg's big black hand appears and attempts to snatch the lamp from the table, to disturb that admirable family concord, and drive the different members of the circle into the street.

Strindberg's *Married* was doomed even before it appeared. People wondered how the publisher, Albert Bonnier, could be bare-faced enough to publish it. And it was expected that the book would be confiscated before it had time to leave the press.

I had heard so much about it myself that, a week ahead of time, I called on the only bookseller in town asking him to send me a copy, well wrapped up, as soon as he had received the first consignment of *Married.*

One day I returned from my walk and was on the point of settling down among my books to continue my studies.

Suddenly my aunt came rushing in, pale and out of breath, just as if she had been present at some bloody massacre in the immediate neighborhood. She was in such a state of agitation that she spoke with difficulty.

"What have you done, Gustaf? How can you do any-

thing like that? I—I thought that you were a decent young man. It is terrible to defile our honorable home in that way."

—What way? I don't see what you are driving at.

And then she told me how my uncle had come home and by chance found a parcel containing *Married* which was lying on my desk. His horror had been so great that he had dropped the book and refused to pick it up except with a pair of fire-tongs. He had taken it back to the bookseller and read the riot-act to him for daring to send the book to me.

When I hastened down to the bookseller to get the book again, he refused to sell it to me. I had a sharp encounter with him, but to no purpose. Through the back-door, however, he sold the book to those special customers of his who belonged to the literary clique of the community, and it had a great run, so much so that when its sale was suppressed, there were but a few copies left.

Those who had read it did not speak of it, but those who had not read it complained that Strindberg had made prostitutes out of all women and reviled all that is sacred.

I myself was treated as a criminal by my relatives, and they did not wish to be seen publicly together with me. They even warned their acquaintances against the Strindberg-friend as against some anarchistic monster.

Such commotion the poor little work, which was misunderstood in advance of its publication, caused all over the country! If there had been a single honest, fearless, influential person who had dared to stand up and to declare that *Married* was a highly conservative

book, the aim of which was to defend the only remaining ideal of the author—woman as wife and mother—there would have been no occasion for this second great national injustice which was brought home to the author with such crushing effect.

For in spite of the fact that the journey home caused by the act of injunction, was a great triumph for him, afterwards all deserted him, even those whose vocation it was to represent free speech and who had inscribed "Liberalism" on their colors.

CHAPTER III.

My First Meeting With Strindberg

WHEN Strindberg left Sweden on the 18th of November, 1884, after the legal proceedings with reference to *Married* were brought to a close, his name became wrapped up almost immediately in a strange silence.

We young people could not but believe that the victory which Strindberg had won when he was acquitted of the charge of blasphemy, would turn all minds towards him and that he would finally be given justice as poet and reformer.

But instead of that he practically disappeared from our view. His literary activity was dormant during the next few years; or if he wrote anything, it did not reach us.

When we again met Strindberg as the unique poet, he was an entirely different man. He had become a skillful dramatist who had written a couple of short hypermodern dramas, *The Father* and *Lady Julia,* which no publisher in all Sweden had cared to print but of which a publisher in Hälsingborg[1] was the financial backer. Despite the fact that Zola had written the preface to *The Father* and partly approved of the play, the public at home rejected it. Strindberg's former friends and protectors, Georg

[1] The second largest city in the province of Scania.

Brandes and Björnstjerne Björnson, pronounced their anathema over him and scattered broadcast over the entire North the opinion that the author of *The Father* was—*a madman.* The story passed from ear to ear that one of Strindberg's psycho-pathological stories, written during his sojourn on a Danish island, was founded on personal experience and that he was ripe for the lunatic asylum.

In the midst of all this literary gossip about him, his *The Inhabitants of Hemsö* made its appearance. In it there was no sign of insanity. With a hand so light that we could hardly believe it to be that of Strindberg, he had painted this Japanese idyl of the skerries. It was a hymn of praise to the summers on Kymmendö,[1] those summers which had seen the birth of *Master Olof* and probably also that of *The New Kingdom,*—a hymn to the out-of-door life among the skerries to which he loved to return from the oppressive heat of France and Switzerland.

We can easily understand why Strindberg regarded his *The Inhabitants of Hemsö* as a literary transgression. His artistic love of truth accused him of having painted the picture in too light colors—like the well-known oil painting "Ruskprick"[2] by his own hand in which is seen nothing but a mist-white ocean and a

[1] In the Stockholm Archipelago.

[2] A sea-mark consisting of a slender pole to the top of which is fixed a small juniper bush or the like. Such navigation marks, rising several yards above the surface of the water, are very common in Swedish lakes and rivers.

still whiter sky, with a big, red "Ruskprick" penetrating through both.

In his introduction to *Life Among the Skerries* Strindberg endeavors in his amiable, naïve manner to exculpate himself from his own charges in this matter. He declares that it is the bright, smiling element in the life of a man who dwells among the skerries—when it actually takes that form—which he desired to depict in *The Inhabitants of Hemsö.* In *Life Among the Skerries* he had endeavored to give the penumbra, and in order to be able fully to excuse himself, he finally half promised to give "possibly later on and under better auspices, the umbra which must exist in order to present the picture in its completeness."

But he never gave us this complete picture with the bluish-black umbra. Things never became so cheerful about him as to permit him to write that work. I believe, besides, that he was too much concerned in the matter himself and that he loved the smiling idyl of the skerries too intensely to deepen it into tragic greatness.

For the inhabitants of central Sweden, *The Inhabitants of Hemsö* came as a harbinger of joy, but for us, the dwellers on the west coast who have learned how to love the strikingly wild which our coast has to offer, much more than the inland lake idyls of the Baltic coast, to us Strindberg's idyl of the skerries was altogether too tame, and shared too much of the nature of Japanese water-colors. This is the reason why at my first meeting with Strindberg, which is now to be related, I made an attempt to convert him, *i.e.* to get him to relinquish his hold on

the entirely idyllic and devote himself and his pen to the titanic, the grandeur of our west coast, which I considered to be more fitting for the author of *The Father*.

After six years of exile Strindberg could stand it no longer. He had to return to his beloved Sweden once more, and it had become so dear to him on account of the visions caused by his long absence, that he could not be satisfied with anything less than actually embracing and beholding his entire native land. He must see it and describe it.

The provincial critic had always emphasized his rural descriptions as the best in his prose works. The practical up-to-date publisher could afford, therefore, to be interested in such a plan as to let Strindberg, the then dethroned chief, undertake a king's circuit through the land.

I had not been able to find out what parts of the country he had covered. But he must have had a particular interest in Bohuslän, for one of the first provinces that he explored rather thoroughly was that province.

One day in September, 1890, the local press announced that August Strindberg had arrived in Gothenburg and taken up his abode at Göta Källare.[1] He intended to study the natural sceneries of Bohuslän and go on a sail along the coast.

One of the first to call on him was Gustaf af Geijerstam[2], who was at the time employed by August Lindberg

[1] One of the principal hotels.

[2] Swedish author (1858-1909).

as a sort of literary-aesthetic critic or counsellor, translator and dramatist. Strindberg and Geijerstam were still the best of friends and Geijerstam did everything in his power during Strindberg's stay in Gothenburg to make the latter enjoy all possible privileges during his Bohuslän journey. He provided a large suitable sailing-yacht for Strindberg's use. The intellectual element of the city of Gothenburg gave a reception in his honor.

And one day Geijerstam made arrangements for me to meet Strindberg. My card of introduction was that I was an enthusiastic disciple of his and that I had been all over the coast which he now proposed to explore, so that I might perhaps be permitted to put my services at his disposal.

About seven o'clock I called at the hotel. The hours between seven and ten in the evening, eleven at the latest, were always Strindberg's conversation hours. Then he enjoyed sitting down to a cup with some good friend or casual acquaintance.

When Strindberg came down stairs to meet me that evening, I saw him personally for the first time. I saw his mighty head with the disarranged gigantic mane illumined by the gas-light just behind him in the stairs. But within this halo of a saint, I saw a face the traits of which were harder and colder than those of the youthful poet with the thorn pressed against the forehead. He had endured many sufferings since that time and they had left an intensified paleness on his face. They had

plowed furrows in his cheeks and dug dark hollows under his eyes.

His eyes! In these there was nothing of the dreamer, of that Master Olof whom I had loved as a good brother. They were light grey and cold, the flash of the eye was sharp and repellent, and the continual forcing of the focus had, as it were, pressed the eyes farther back under the vault of the forehead. Immediately I recognized in him the persecuted man, and I saw that unceasing hounding had changed him so strangely that he had something wolfish in his nature. There was a tension in his expression as though he were ready immediately to snap back in case anyone yelped at him.

There was, besides, a different air about him from the one he had displayed in the pictures of his youth. In some of these there is something unrefined about him. In one of them he reminds you of a young fellow who has been sitting on the tailor's table[1] all his life and thereby acquired an expression of fatuity.[2] In another there pops up a sort of school teacher who pretends to be a superior spirit in spite of the fact that detachable cuffs reach down on his knuckles. Of the youthful face of 1870, which in my opinion is ideally beautiful, there was not a trace, nor did he resemble in the least the pictures of his later youth.

The Strindberg of forty met me as a cosmopolitan.

[1] Allusion to the fact that the tailor sits on the table while working.

[2] Possibly a reference to a picture taken in 1884 which is very unattractive.

He looked very much like a sculptor who had travelled for a long time. His dress was faultless and modest. He also impressed me as being tired, to a certain extent, of all that he had seen and experienced. I did not know at that time that the romance of his first marriage was then drawing to a close, that a third person had come between him and his wife and that one of the reasons for Strindberg's journeys at that time was the need of being away from the two women, who made his life at home unbearable.

Geijerstam introduced me to him, we seated ourselves at a window in the *café,* and when Geijerstam left for the theatre the conversation was soon under way.

In the beginning Strindberg was rather reticent. Without pretending to do so, he sat there and spied on me secretly. As I wished to gain his confidence at once and make it plain to him that I had no evil designs, I began making a sort of literary proposal.

He sat there quietly and listened to the tale of how we, the young at the old petrified Latin School, had been carried away by his first poems. I told him how his youthful power of action had proved contagious in our case, how we had joined him in the insurrection and how we had had to suffer with him.

Strindberg sat there in silence and heard me as I poured over him all the enthusiasm of youth which we had received from him. What he thought of it all, I do not know, but it was not until afterwards that I noticed what a confirmed skeptic he was. He could take my words for what they were worth, I felt that it was my

duty to pour out my heart before him. He gave no sign of displeasure, and that being so, I thought I had some reason to be satisfied.

Afterwards we chanced upon other subjects. He began to ask me questions about Bohuslän, and when I suggested that he ought to study the northern part of it in particular, because of the fact that the landscape was of unusual beauty and grandeur, he immediately agreed to my proposition.

—And do you know why? he asked. Well, because the primary rock in the northern part consists of red granite while that of the southern part is grey.

And immediately he entered into a geological exposition of the structure of the entire country, presented so plainly and clearly that later on it impressed me like a painting. I was amazed not only at his knowledge, but also at his ability to complete this geological *ensemble* in a few rapid strokes. When he had ceased talking, I wished to put forth a feeler as to whether it was only a scientific interest that attracted him to Bohuslän, or whether he was particularly fond of our Bohuslän scenery. His answer shocked me most terribly. —Bohuslän! No, it is as insanely ugly as a landscape on the moon.

I tried to defend what I considered beautiful beyond all comparison and, therefore, I began an attack on the skerry-environs of Stockholm. I declared that one must feel depressed among those islands covered with dark-green spruce and pine, that the dark-green and the bluish gray tone of the water do not go

well together, that at my first visit to the Stockholm skerries, I was unable to breathe until I had reached Sandhamn.[1]

Strindberg defended himself by describing his Kymmendö—yet without mentioning it by name, for he always tried to make a secret out of that spot which he loved most dearly of all that I heard him speak of—and he described its loveliness in such colors that I could feel that he had enjoyed daily being in the midst of this ideal landscape.

My beloved Bohuslän, on the other hand, I could not induce him to love. I described a sail along its coast. I recalled to him how we wake up in the morning in a setting that has not changed since the time of the Vikings. It forms the background of primaeval man. And the red tinge of the cliffs against the light green, isn't that the most beautiful combination of colors that can be seen in nature?

But Strindberg was not to be moved. This Prometheus, who indeed, if anyone, was in every respect created for a background like that of a Bohuslän landscape, this Viking of violent passion, had fallen desperately in love with the idyllic surroundings of his native city!

And this really seemed to me altogether unreasonable, that he who himself had proclaimed that "he found the joy of existence in the hard, cruel struggle of life," should be capable of loving natural sceneries which are the very opposite of all that.

[1] An island in the outer fringe of the Stockholm Archipelago.

However, we glided away from this topic on which we entertained such absolutely incompatible views. Already at my first meeting with Strindberg, I noticed how greatly it displeased him to be contradicted. He did not suffer the least little hobby, to which he himself clung, to be rudely manipulated.

This right he reserved for himself. It seemed as though the destruction of a truth which for a long time he had been imparting to all whom he met, the grinding of it to the finest powder between the heavy stones of his mental mill, and the scattering of it to the winds, gave to this indefatigable self-tormenter above all other things the most exquisite enjoyment. Hence his wrath against anyone who tried to anticipate him.

He was in his favorite mood when he could play the part of story teller. In his autobiography he repeatedly asserts that in this *genre* he has outrun others not a little, or to make a clean boast of it—an entire ell.

So we next spoke of movements down there in continental Europe. This topic warmed him up. The woman question he considered that he had exhausted and placed in its proper *milieu* as a speciality for unmarried society women alone. The labor question he had for a time lost interest in, because of the endeavors on the part of the industrial socialists to bring about a complete state of bankruptcy in contemporary society. But the agricultural question appealed to him, and he had tried to study it during a lengthy sojourn among the French peasantry. This class naturally makes up the main bulk

of the nation, and it is therefore among them that the new commonwealth must be founded.

Besides, he was skeptical about all these social theories, and those which he himself had only lately enunciated, he had already torn to pieces. In one question, however, he showed a lively interest, and that was the dreadful possibility hinted at by Henry George, viz., that modern civilization was face to face with a decline, and that once more we had to expect the mediaeval *Fimbul-winter*.[1]

While Strindberg told of all this, the latest and the very latest,—that which in the very course of speaking he added as a conclusion to the preceding—he truly lived over again, as it were, a thousand lives. He became Master Olof once more, but a Master Olof who had abandoned the church where there was no longer any work to do, and who had devoted himself to a more general betterment of the world, a utilitarian, as he then styled himself.

All the time while talking he smoked cigarettes. He inhaled the smoke with the same passionate delight that he hurled forth a few paradoxes with which he hoped to catch me. But when I cleared the reefs on which he hoped to test me it did not seem to disappoint him but rather to cause him satisfaction.

At times when he had launched some crushing argument or just caught the idea of one, he would suddenly stop and perform a cigarette smoker's *tour d'adresse*

[1] The hard winter, which precedes the twilight of the gods, lasts for three years and foretells the destruction of the gods (Asar) and the world.

which made the same pleasing impression on me as some clownery in the circus. It was at the same time amusing and cleverly executed. He would inhale a big puff of smoke which he managed in such a manner that it made two consecutive circuits through his nose and throat.

This smoker's *tour d'adresse* seemed to me to be something more than a mere trick. It bared one side of Strindberg even more than any of the words he had pronounced on this occasion: it testified to how great and flaming a passion he had always been in this cold world.

The spirit kept rising gradually the longer we continued. We were drinking Swedish nectar,[1] and little by little we had got into the student atmosphere which Strindberg had a special ability to produce. This ability he retained even to old age. Despite the fact that he had already made a great name in Europe and had been overwhelmed with international marks of esteem, he had not acquired any overbearing manners. He was plain and natural and did not pound the humble opponent to death with peremptory language.

But he was also at this time an entirely different man from the pale Loke whom I had seen descending the hotel stairs. His cheeks had taken on color, his eyes had grown darker and seemed to be dark-blue, they were beaming and open and had lost every sign of suspicion. The Strindberg who extended his hand to me with a good-night was a man full of grace and good will, and I grasped his hand as firmly and as cordially as though I

[1] Swedish punch, the national beverage, made from sugar, arrac, water and some other ingredients.

had been saying good-bye for a long time to my own father.

When he returned from his trip through Bohuslän, I did not have a chance to see him. I only heard from Geijerstam that Strindberg had had some disagreeable experiences. The foul gossip in connection with his *Married* had penetrated even to the unliterary inhabitants of the wilds of the country, so that the people openly showed him their hatred for being the father of *Married*. But this after all was no wonder, for the local press had done its best during the years just preceding to keep him continually on the rack.

CHAPTER IV.

The Wandering Scientific Investigator

IN his endeavor to obtain more knowledge and new forms of artistic expression, Strindberg always followed the highest precedents.

The name which he most often pronounced when people spoke to him about art and learning, was that of Goethe. To judge by what he said about the German Olympian, it seems that secretly he had chosen him as his special ideal and that he always endeavored to test himself and to judge himself through a comparison with Goethe.

Whenever there was a period in Strindberg's life when for one reason or another he could not busy his restless brain with writing, impetuously and with great energy he delved into studies of various kinds. As a young library clerk he studied Swedish history and the Chinese language. During his sojourn in Switzerland he was occupied principally with modern sociology. At the beginning of his second long exile, when he stayed with Ola Hansson[1] in Friedrichshagen and later on in Berlin, the exact sciences and modern natural sciences claimed his attention.

When I found Strindberg in a dark, half-furnished studio in Ola Hansson's little cottage in Friedrichshagen

[1] Swedish author.

near Berlin about two years after I had met him in Gothenburg, it was not the poet Strindberg that received me, but rather the man of scientific research.

He had spent a couple of very unpleasant years in the vicinity of Stockholm. His large book about *Sweden's Natural Sceneries* he had not finished. He had had to go through the long painful proceedings of divorce from his first wife. He had passed most of his time in the skerries, had written some of his short, masterly one-act plays, he had painted a large number of pictures—so many that he might have arranged a separate exhibition —and he had described his first conjugal inferno in *A Fool's Confession.*

These two years of suffering and poverty played an important part in Strindberg's life. Doubtless they laid the foundation for that state of excessive irritability which paved the way for the great Inferno-period a few years later. If these years had not been so hard, Strindberg's career after 1892 might have become entirely different from what it was.

When Strindberg went into exile this time, he thought it was for the last time. During the voyage from Stockholm to Stettin, the steamer was followed by a huge dark-blue tidal wave, which he later on reproduced in colors, and this indefatigable pursuer he regarded as an omen that he must keep away from his ungrateful countrymen.

When I first met him in Friedrichshagen, he had the appearance of a man who finally could breathe again after a long confinement in a hospital.

He asserted that with *A Fool's Confession* he had said his last word as a story-writer—how many last words has he not said since? He had arrived at that meridian in life when a man has a very good reason to sit down in the easy chair and rest while thinking over what life has been and what the future may have in store.

His quill of *belles lettres* he had thrown away; but one thing still retained his interest in life: late years had seen the birth of a movement of great scientific activity accompanied by a great many new results. Into these he wished to penetrate in order to ascertain whether he could find what he sought. With a proud gesture he pointed at two large piles of unbound scientific works which he had piled up against the wall. He had bought them with the first money he had received on German soil. But he had made up his mind that he could not afford a bookshelf.

Consequently his studio in Friedrichshagen was not very inviting. Besides the scientific books there was an old easel which looked like a dirt-brown skeleton. Over by the window to be sure there was a table, but it looked as though it was not in use. There lay upon it a couple of uncut books, also pen and ink, but no paper piled up in stacks of manuscripts, nor notes with which Strindberg usually busied himself so persistently.

In the back-ground of the room he had arranged his little "salon" with a drawing-room table, a few antique arm-chairs and a lounge. In one of the arm-chairs Ola Hansson sat in silence the whole evening while Strindberg and I engaged in conversation.

The long seclusion in the skerries had made Strindberg more taciturn than he usually was. It was difficult to get under way a conversation that might carry him along. He did not wish to discuss the subject of *belles lettres;* he thought the subject was below his dignity. I tried to tell about Herman Gorter's new literary achievements and about Walt Whitman, the great American author,— the two new planets about which my life revolved during these two years.

But Strindberg cared for neither of them. It interested him far more to hear about the red Indians with whom I had come in contact the year before out there in the wild west. An individual with much of the primitive man in him as he was, he seems always to have sympathized with these tactiturn, mystic people of the wilds, and this in spite of the fact that it was not until towards the end of his life that he thought he had made the interesting discovery that the Indians probably were descendants of the Phoenicians and that Indian word-roots are of a purely Hebrew and Greek origin.

What at this time was of particular interest to him as regards the Indians was whether their reticence in the council was a sign of concentrated mental activity or its very opposite. He suddenly asked me if I had not ascertained this while I was among them.

Of course I had not made any direct inquiries of the kind since I was not aware of the fact that this was an unexplored field. But to judge by what I had seen of Indians, I had been able to come to the conclusion that they have the power of thinking so secretly

that one cannot by any signs whatsoever divine their thoughts. Furthermore, I had found that when they talk, they express themselves with such concentration and by means of images of such poetic coloring that they give you the impression of refined thinkers. On these two grounds I thought it safe to assure Strindberg that the great, mystic silence of the Indians could not be due to inactivity of the brain. This seemed to please him, although I am not certain that he was fully convinced.

I told him also of a success he had had out there in unliterary U. S. A. Popular among the Swedes he was not, of course, since they are all church-people as a rule, church-goers of the most narrow-minded kind—and as such void of all understanding of every kind of critique of the existing order of things. After having read Strindberg's *The Red Room,* the majority of those whom I met had received the impression that Strindberg was a dangerous anarchist, and they had made up their minds not to read another line from his pen. Even the Swedish-American Singing Societies, which toured Sweden a year or two before Strindberg's death, disowned him and refused to give a red cent to the national fund which was started at that time in order that the officially disowned poet might be given a *Nobel-Prize by the Swedish people.*

All the more wonderful it is, therefore, that one of Strindberg's works that was least popular at home, *The Swedish People at Home,* had scored a great success that very year among the exiles in America. It was the founder and former editor of the weekly paper called

The Viking, who had settled down in Chicago, to whom we are indebted for this.

Out there he went by the name of Mr. Strand, and he had undertaken to print the entire work and to reproduce the illustrations. The enterprise was such a success that *The Swedish People at Home* next to the Bible was the most popular book in the Swedish language in the United States of America. The publisher had made a net gain of $20,000 on Strindberg, and when I told him that the author was somewhere in the skerries outside of Stockholm in a most destitute condition, Mr. Strand declared that he wanted to send Strindberg a royalty of $2000, if he only could get his address.

After our meeting in Friedrichshagen we wrote, both Strindberg and myself, to Strand with reference to the royalty, which would have come in very handy for Strindberg at that time. But we never received an answer, and according to what I learned later on, Strand lost every cent he had made on Strindberg, when he tried to publish a second work of the author.

As usual we discussed that evening everything between heaven and earth. The strongest impression that I received of Strindberg at that time, was his joy at having broken off all relations with *belles lettres.* It seemed as if this sort of authorship had fagged him out entirely—he had, shortly before, performed such a volitional *tour de force* as *A Fool's Confession*—as though he had been quite tired out with this groping in space to which poetic activity is so conducive.

Now, having entered the province of science, he felt

that he was on firm ground. He rejoiced with the enthusiasm of a child because the subjects with which he was to occupy himself were so evident that there could be no further reasons for doubt. He no longer wished to be the everlasting skeptic, the never-ceasing wrecker of the *status quo.* Now the work of clearing had been performed and he considered the time of reconstruction to be at hand.

His miscalculations were of a most serious nature. He delved into the exact sciences, but everywhere he came across great blanks, which he could not call exact. This caused a break with the natural sciences in general, and from having been a simple-hearted, naïve believer, he became in this province also the revolutionary Loke.

Three years afterwards he bursts out in his *Sylva Sylvarum:* "A generation that has had the courage to dethrone God the Father, to tear down the state, the church, the commonwealth, and morals, still bows before the sciences. But in the sciences where liberty ought to rule, the pass-word is: Believe in the authorities or die! A pillar of the Bastille had not yet been raised in Paris on the spot where the former Sorbonne was situated, and the cross still dominated the Panthéon and the cupola of the Institute.

"There was, therefore, nothing more to do in the world, and feeling that I was superfluous, I determined to disappear."

Thus Strindberg's endeavor to find something exact

and stable to cling to resulted in a fit of despair which almost led to suicide.

His arrival in Germany this time took place at a most inopportune moment and under the most unfavorable conditions. If the author—so speaks the German enthusiastic Strindberg scholar, Hermann Esswein—like young Schillar had found a Weimar among us, that element in him which alone could have brought poise and calm into his life and thus cleansed his spirit of all inclinations to extremes, would undoubtedly have increased in strength and perhaps even conquered in the end.

"But Strindberg found no Weimar, only modern Berlin. He found no aesthetic-philosophic spiritual culture that could inspire confidence, but a roaring, seething chaos of efforts and onsets in every direction and all that childishly wild, shallow spirituality, void of perspective, which always foams up as soon as new fields are opened for materialistic culture or exploitation."

Instead of finding the new syntheses which modern science had been able to produce during the latter decades, Strindberg at that time came across the fundamental preparatory works, a lot of details that had not as yet been systematically arranged. He only found the foundations, but no temples upon them, and it was this that so deeply embittered him, who came with all his strong religiosity prepared to embrace the new rationalism.

It was a new Red Room period which he passed through during this stay in Berlin. But it was entirely different from that period of his youth in which he fought

bureaucracy with Berns Salonger[1] as rendez-vous. Already the name *At the Sign of the Black Pig* symbolizes this Berlin sojourn. In the little wine room in *The Sign of the Black Pig* at the corner of Unter den Linden and Potsdamerstrasse, where Strindberg passed the evenings that winter, the questions of the day were discussed, and everything that seemed in the least antiquated became the object of sharp attacks.

Among the friends with whom Strindberg associated there and who seem to have had some influence on him, the most important was the Polish author Stanislaw Przybyszewski whom Strindberg in *Inferno* (pp. 66—67) calls "my friend, my disciple who called me 'father', because he had learned of me, my Famulus, who gave me the name of master and kissed my hands because his life began where mine ended."

Of none of his literary friends have I heard Strindberg speak with such enthusiasm as of this Stachu (an abbreviation of Stanislaw). In the beginning of their acquaintance, Strindberg spoke of him as a universal genius and called him "the great Pole". But Stachu belonged to those all-embracing minds who try to encompass so much that no systems suffice, and whose sphere of thought—except within well-arranged special fields—is a never-ceasing, billowing chaos.

Besides this, Stachu was one of those who have a need of deadening the increasing *Weltschmerz* with continual

[1] Fashionable restaurant and café on the south side of Berzelii Park.

Dionysian orgies. In his despair over the negative results to which he had come, we can easily imagine how natural it would be for Strindberg to enter into the spirit of those wine-nights in the little *café* with the unattractive name.

In order to have something wherewith to counteract the romantic Pole, Strindberg engaged a couple of scientific assistants at this time who served him in the capacity of controllers—when they were allowed to do so, which was not always the case—with reference to those discoveries of "scientific mistakes" or "exact lies" which Strindberg made from time to time.

Despite the fact that Strindberg now had renounced his artistic activities, he showed himself in all his artistic glory in these scientific investigations. He did not study the sciences in the same manner as the sponge-brains at our universities who absorb mechanically; on the contrary, he reacted against everything, added up his suspicions until he had quite a batch, and when he had several such blocks ready, he began to make his syntheses sometimes based on a real blunder and thus leading nowhere, but on other occasions bringing results which were reached intuitively and proved to be of real value.

It must be granted that what Strindberg accomplished was not scientific achievement in the strict sense of the word. But time and time again, he raised questions of such surprising ingenuity that the ordinary servants of the Temple of the Sciences probably would not have hit upon them for a long time, had they not had this original forerunner.

When the professional men of science referred to Strindberg's extraordinary imaginative faculty, just as though that faculty was responsible for his going astray, he met them with the words of the great English scientist, Tyndall: "Without the imaginative faculty we cannot proceed a single step beyond the purely animal world, perhaps not even reach the boundaries of the animal world."

This power of imagination which is just as indispensable to the searching scientist—the great mark of differentiation between him and the scientific collector—as it is to the poet and the painter, this power Strindberg could not shut out in spite of every resolution. He remained a poet not only in his scientific works, but in this way he even came to compose scientific novels and sagas and thus created the most hypermodern *genre* which has been produced by any of the contemporary poets.

As an example of this kind of literary production, I will cite only some of the more sensational, such as his: *The Deadhead Butterfly,* in which the scientist sings a hymn to immortality, *The Alpine Violet,* in which he demonstrates how nature herself breaks up all systems, *The Bridal Night of the Crickets,* in which he makes chemistry itself arrange a tragi-comedy in a tumbler full of water.

Strindberg, however, had entirely different inner needs which could not be appeased by the soulless materialism that was the fashion at the time. These needs drove him

step by step over the great rubbish-heap of the occult sciences, and finally brought about that catastrophe which precipitated him into his life's deepest Inferno.

But before Strindberg got there, he had committed another great folly. Tired of the bachelor's life he had been leading he became desirous of once more casting in his lot with that of a young woman. This time it was a girl whom he met by chance in the literary *coterie* of which he was an associate.

It was love at first sight that attracted them to one another. But Strindberg scarcely seemed to be acquainted with this little Frida Uhl who before long—when insanity threatened him—became his "pretty jailer". Neither in what he said nor in what he wrote about her, can we form an estimate of the young woman.

She got him away from the wild bacchanalian nights, however. As she was a woman of the world, she did not wish to see her betrothed in the somewhat rustic wardrobes that Strindberg had brought with him from the skerries. She compelled him to buy modern clothes in Berlin.

One day artloving Berlin saw the serious man of research, August Strindberg, and the charming Fräulein Frida Uhl coming up to the National Gallery of Art on a sort of exhibition trip. Strindberg had jammed himself into the traditional apparel of an extreme Berlin dandy: Suit of a large-checkered material with large cuffs on the pantaloons, a short yellowish-gray top-coat, a loud necktie, a cane of exaggerated size and a well-polished

silk hat which hardly could be induced to remain on Strindberg's fluffy lion's mane!

Shortly afterwards both disappeared from Berlin. They had started on their honeymoon to Heligoland and Gravesend.

CHAPTER V.

Inferno

IT does not seem improbable that Strindberg began what he calls his Inferno-wandering—the "pathological crisis" of his physicians—during his honeymoon at Gravesend.

Several times during our conversation he reverted to one of the experiences of that period. It is also discussed in some of his autobiographical works, probably in some of the Blue Books.

One Sunday morning he left Gravesend for London. On one of the morning trains he had arrived at the station just south of London Bridge. From this point he continued on foot, crossing at this early morning hour the long, deserted bridge.

But suddenly the bridge is no longer deserted. Towards him there comes like a wave an endless procession of mystic penitents, all with hoods over their heads, so that only the gray beards or the chins are visible, advancing slowly and with silent steps.

Strindberg would always revert to these phantoms of London Bridge. If they were real, then, through the deep impression they made upon him, they aided in bringing about the crisis which was being fanned to life within him. If, on the other hand, they were not real but mere visions, then they formed the introduction to the "pathological crisis".

Fully corporeal visions Strindberg never pretends to have had. Of their nature we can judge by his diarian notes in *Inferno*. When they became numerous, he felt a desire to keep track of them, and from 1895 to 1909, he thus continued his diary of which the pages in *Inferno* are an abstract. As a rule he seems to have had auditory hallucinations, conversations with invisible persons, with Swedenborg and others.

He had to cut short his honey-moon in order to fight out his second literary lawsuit, because *A Fool's Confession* had been seized. Thereupon he accompanied his wife for the first time to her relatives in the little Catholic village on the Danube. After that he did not come in touch with his friends until March, 1894, when he returned to Friedrichshagen, where he put up at a hotel in order to read the proofs of his *Antibarbarus I.*

During the time he wrote this book, Strindberg had got into peculiar ways, and when his attention was called to the fact that here and there his argument was based on erroneous premises, he would not join issue on the subject. He became embittered and ceased to associate with his friends. He shut himself up within his own self and became impervious to reason.

After having returned to Austria for the summer, Strindberg left for Paris in August. There he no longer studied the sciences in the proper sense of the word; he had cast them all overboard because of the fact that he had met with a few incongruities in what, of course, should have been entirely flawless, and instead, with the wild desire of the passionate seeker after truth, he had

entered the apocryphal borderland of science, alchemy and hyperchemistry instead of scientific chemistry, astrology instead of astronomy, etc. He had also severed relations with literary art and his interest had gone over to mediaeval necromancy.

Strindberg hastened to Paris in order there to devote himself to these quasi-sciences. He believed himself to be in possession of certain ideas which, if he could prove them, would immediately make him famous within the province of scientific research, perhaps bring him enormous riches. As he had not written any literary works which brought him an income, he was practically destitute of everything.

I wish by the way to point out in this connection that Strindberg during his Inferno-period in Paris doubtless would have starved to death unless a stout-hearted Swede had intervened and sent him 300 crowns[1] a month (the same amount that Bonnier paid him for *The Inhabitants of Hemsö*). This man was Vult von Steyern, editor and publisher of *The Daily News,* who ever since the legal proceedings against Strindberg caused by *Married,* had faithfully stood by him when want from time to time peeped in at his door.

Strindberg's little Austrian wife had accompanied him to Paris. As she was not only a hindrance to him in his scientific research and proposed experiments but also could not but notice that a pathological crisis was imminent, Strindberg took the first opportunity to send

[1] The Swedish crown is normally worth about 27 cents.

her home. The pretence was that their little daughter Kerstin had taken ill.

Strindberg tells of the "wild joy" he experienced when he was rid of his wife: "My pretty jailor who spied on my soul night and day, guessed my secret thoughts, watched the trend of my ideas, jealously observed my soul's striving towards the unknown."

It was the latter in particular which worried and tortured Strindberg. The serious psychic disturbance through which he passed during the following few years already began to show itself in certain peculiarities which obliged the little Austrian woman to play the part of an attendant. In spite of his constant, keen self-analysis, Strindberg could not observe the abnormalities which his sickness caused. Not even years after his recuperation would he recognize them as manifestations of a disease of the mind. And this is consistent with the nature of the disease.

As Strindberg himself feared the worst, he decided to rid himself entirely of his wife. Seized with a mad desire to do himself harm, he says, he committed what he has termed "suicide" by sending her an outrageous, unpardonable letter and saying farewell to wife and child, hinting that a new relation had laid hold on his thoughts.

This new relation which had taken hold of his thoughts, was his metaphysical brooding, not at all another woman. After this letter to his wife, he calls himself "Self-murderer and assassin", and becomes misanthropic to such a degree that he repels everybody. And yet he wonders that nobody comes to call on him.

The same night his wife left him, he began his experiments. With drawn curtains, fearing to be taken for an anarchist, he worked with a smelting furnace fire in a Dutch stove and six crucibles of fine china bought for money "stolen from himself" in order to demonstrate that there is carbonaceous matter in sulphur and that sulphur, therefore, is not an element. Towards morning he thought he had found carbon in the residue of the sulphur and that thus he had "upset standard chemistry" and attained to that "immortality which mortals grant."

He was jealously anxious about his great discovery and did not dare to let it be known among the authorities. He wished to prove also that sulphur contains hydrogen and oxygen, but he did not possess enough apparatus. His monthly allowances he had spent in experiments, he ceased to take regular meals, and besides, during the first "sulphur-night," he had burned his hand so severely that the skin peeled off and he could not touch anything without feeling pain.

"My hands were black as want, bleeding as my heart," he complains in *Inferno*.

But at the same time, he begins to speak of *Unknown Powers* which had persecuted him for years and put obstacles in his way. He is surrounded by a frightfully solemn, empty silence, and this induces him to challenge the Invisible One to wrestle with him body to body and soul against soul.

Thus the "atheistic" free-thinker, the convert to the occult sciences, has no sooner stepped over the threshold of the temple of the magians than he conjures up "an

invisible one" to wrestle with. He has become an atheist, he says, because he has noticed how the unknown powers leave the world to its fate without showing the least signs of life.

But at the same moment in which he, as a follower of the occult sciences, takes this purely atheistic stand, he conjures up the Great Invisible One. His entire metaphysical endeavor thus had this aim: the seeking after a God and a harmonious conception of God.

His Inferno-wandering shows many phenomena like those by which the psychic sufferer is beset; he suffers continually from the mania that he is pursued, a Russian by the name of Popoffsky (the Pole Przybyszewski) has come to Paris in company with his wife in order to murder Strindberg, and he announces this round about Strindberg's hotel by playing Schumann's *Aufschwung* etc.

But in spite of all this, Strindberg, in the midst of the chaos of these storms, retains that wonderful self-control, that sovereignty over himself which he owes to his artistic qualities and which finally brings him deliverance. When his occult friend, the practitioner of black arts, who calls himself Simeon Magus in their anonymous correspondence, wishes to influence Strindberg, he wards him off with real heroism. Magus preaches the denial and the destruction of the *ego*, but Strindberg answers that this is madness.

"What little I may possibly know," says Strindberg, "emanates from my *ego* as the centre; the destruction of the *ego* is suicide."

Despite the fact that Strindberg loves and admires this invisible magician, with whom he is connected only through correspondence, in every letter he presents him with proofs of his antipathy for theosophy, and when Magus begins to make use of elevated language and tries to tyrannize him, as if Strindberg were a lunatic, and orders the poet to read Mme. Blavatsky[1], the self-conscious artist within Strindberg assumes such proportions that he becomes a head taller than the magician, and Strindberg declares proudly that he does not need any Blavatsky and *that nobody has anything to teach him.* When the magian still threatens, he is warned not to meddle with Strindberg's fate which "is in the keeping of the hand of Providence which always has guided me."

At the same time that he so powerfully beat back the attack of the magian against his spiritual liberty, he secretly suffered mental torments of the worst kind, believing himself to be in continual danger of his life, pursued by his former friend the Pole.

At this time Strindberg had taken up his abode in the old Catholic Hotel Orfila in rue d'Assas, and I, not knowing of his presence, had settled down in Hotel des Americains in rue de l'Abbé de l'Epée, on the other side of the southernmost part of the Jardin du Luxembourg, where Strindberg had resided earlier.

From mutual friends I learned that Strindberg dwelled in the Quartier de Montparnasse, but that he had begged to be excused from social intercourse on account of his

[1] Reference is here made to the work entitled "Secret Doctrine."

chemical experiments. It was hinted that he was not in his right mind and that on this account it was advisable to respect his refusal to receive callers. Where he kept himself nobody knew, since the day when he had had an attack of nerves because dinner had been served for him in the yard of Mme. Charlotte's Crémerie in rue de la grande Chaumière, the little restaurant of the artists where he surely was surrounded by sincere friends.

One day the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch came and related that he had run across Strindberg who had commenced to feel rather lonesome and shown himself desirous of his company. In order to facilitate his approach, Munch had proposed to paint Strindberg's picture, and Strindberg had been posing for him a couple of hours now and then.

But Strindberg had a fixed idea. Ever since he had heard Schumann's *Aufschwung* played one afternoon in the neighborhood of Hotel Orfila, he had been fully convinced that Przybyszewski had arrived in Paris by way of Vienna-Berlin in order to murder him. The reason for the Pole's mania for murder was that his wife had been intimate with Strindberg only a very short time before she had met the Pole.

Without being initiated into the details, anyone will readily see that on such grounds Stachu scarcely had a reason for conjuring up a hatred of Strindberg so glowing as to inspire him with the idea of murder. Munch and myself knew very well that there was another man on whom Stachu had lavished all his hatred and whom he had dealt a severe blow by describing him

unsympathetically in a novel where he ended his life as a suicide. Thus he had already exacted the vengeance, the taking of which he seems to have imposed upon himself on account of the liberties which his wife had permitted herself before her marriage, and had no special occasion to fly into fits of anger.

The endeavors on the part of Munch to assure Strindberg that he had nothing to fear from the Przybyszewskis, were in vain. Once Strindberg got this false notion into his head, no counter-evidence could get it out of him. Not even the fact that Stachu was in Copenhagen in the greatest misery and, try all he might, could not possibly come to Paris to continue his studies of trials of witches and mediaeval Satanism!

Finally, however, Strindberg got a piece of counter-evidence before which he had to bow. From Berlin came the news that Przybyszewski's first wife, a young Polish woman, had committed suicide after having murdered their two children because of worries over lack of support, and that Stachu, who immediately had gone there, had been arrested and stood indicted for having urged her to commit this deed of despair.

When, on the 18th of June—Strindberg mentions this in his *Inferno*—Munch came in, annihilated and trembling from head to foot and broke the news to Strindberg, the latter had to give up his false notion. And—characteristic of Strindberg—he was so completely delivered of it, that as soon as the first surprise had abated, he felt sincere sympathy for his friend who formerly had shown such a tenacious attachment to him,

and peace came into his soul after he had been pursued for months by monsters of his own imagination.

But threatened he was; this idea he still clung to. Secretly he believed that it was his ardent prayers which had perhaps turned away the dagger and that he had parried the thrust in such a way that it caught the assassin right in the heart.

Just as fearful as he had formerly been of Przybyszewski's dagger, equally eager he now became to save and to reestablish his friend with the murderous intentions. He agreed with Munch that they must save the Pole's literary reputation by an article to be written by Strindberg for the *Revue Blanche* concerning his literary merits and illustrated with his picture (the Pole's) drawn by Munch. But this plan was never executed. An article in a Paris review could hardly have resulted in Przybyszewski's liberation. Other measures had to be taken. Munch was ordered to call me.

After having resided six months in Strindberg's neighborhood without having seen him a single time, I was thus brought together with him as by chance. I know that it was Przybyszewski's indefatigable devotion to Strindberg which had aroused the suspicion of the latter and that Strindberg, of course, was glad to receive support when he was in need of it, but felt an aversion to being gratefully indebted for what he could not repay.

One afternoon about five o'clock, I walked over to Hotel Orfila in order to call for Strindberg. In the porter's lodge, I had to keep company with an old Catholic priest and a couple of young candidates for the

priesthood while the attendant went up stairs to inform Strindberg of the call. His room was tabooed ground, for there he watched in a continual state of anxiety over his great secrets, his new methods for the production of iodine and gold. He was at the time occupied with his gold syntheses.

Hotel Orfila looked like a monastery. The room in which I sat was cold and damp. The old fellows, who came and went, impressed me as "slippery eels" and I felt very depressed at the thought that the Master Olof of my youth had been confined in such a place. A more unfit asylum for one who suffered from typical melancholy could hardly be found.

Finally Strindberg came. With a silent greeting, he beckoned me to follow. Not until we had advanced a good distance in the street did he begin to speak.

I saw in his pale, ashen face what torments he had passed through. Since he now really occupied himself with black arts, I believe that there would be in his traits something of that proud boldness characteristic of the necromancer. For I had met some of the leading followers of occult sciences in Paris and I had had an opportunity of studying them at close quarters. In Strindberg there was not a sign of this presumptuousness by which, as he tells us, he had been beset, this *hybris*[1] which is the only sin the gods cannot pardon.

On the contrary, Strindberg had already something of the penitent about him. I saw in his eyes that he had

[1] A Greek term meaning: wantonness, wanton insolence, etc.

regretted his injustice towards Przybyszewski. The sensitive giant was nervous as a young girl and seemed almost to be accusing himself for the misfortunes of Stachu. I told him that it was the Pole's own brother who had accused him, but that made Strindberg even more conscious of guilt. He still thought that it was his —Strindberg's—hatred which had crystallized in the brother and caused him to play the part of accuser.

But now, when Przybyszewski was in jail and accused of having caused his Polish wife to commit murder and suicide, Strindberg's sympathy for the unfortunate man had been aroused.

We seated ourselves among the trees in front of the Brasserie des Lilas, and ordered some absinthe. Ever since Strindberg had ceased to frequent Mme. Charlotte's, this place had been his regular resort. But he never took his meals here, he only dropped in to provide for a little brighter dreams with diluted wormwood poison and for that fatigue which was necessary for him in order to sleep.

He was now so terribly upset about the fate of Stachu that he was ready to commit follies to save him. I was to assist him in starting diplomatic action from Paris in order to get Stachu out of jail. Strindberg was to make the declaration that Stachu was altogether too talented an artist and altogether too sensitive a being to endure a term in jail. It would mean insanity and the authorities would be guilty of spiritual murder.

Strindberg got tangled up in such difficulties that in the end we did not know how to execute his much too elaborate plan. He seemed to be convinced that Stachu

was guilty and just on that account had to be saved in some supernatural way.

As I for my part was convinced that Stachu would clear himself, and with his superior powers of psychological analysis would be able to brush aside his brother's accusation, I considered it far more important to try to calm Strindberg than to plunge into great political adventures which in the end would lead to no results.

But Strindberg did not consent to be calmed. It struck me that he was bound to be occupied with some subject of care. On purely physical grounds he had been forced to give up the fixed idea that Stachu's dagger was over him continually, and as he was now out of that perpetual danger, he had to have another. He seemed to be desirous of pushing his diplomatic action so *in absurdum* that people finally might receive the impression that it was he himself who was to blame for the murder in Berlin and not the man who had been arrested.

Our long argument ended with my consenting to write to certain influential persons in Berlin. We also agreed that the large Polish colony in Paris should be stirred up, but that not until this had been accomplished would we resort to diplomatic ways and means. Strindberg in any case had had a chance to give vent to his fears and to air his plans. And he went home considerably appeased and not without a certain amount of self-satisfaction at the thought that the possibility of a little martyrdom still loomed up in the distance.

People had been speaking of Strindberg's insanity, which it was thought would soon break out. Of all that

he said that night, I found nothing that indicated those soft spots in the brain which I have noticed in certain friends of mine who have become a prey to the disease.

In the same hotel where I had put up lived another author who for a long period of years was rated as one of the most prominent in his native land, and this man had for more than ten years been the subject of such well-developed insanity that it seemed incredible to me that he could control it. Once he had lost control and for six months he had been flogged by the attendants of an asylum simultaneously with his drawing up of the outline of the foremost literary monument that he left to posterity. And that man was so insane beyond all bounds that he had a decided inclination to impart some of it to those with whom he associated in order, as it were, to dilute the poison within himself.

Nothing of the kind existed in Strindberg's case. He had strange manias such as he always had had. But now he had one, more dangerous than the others: that of accusing himself of all kinds of transgressions. Besides this, in his researches he had got into a *cul-de-sac* where it was plain to him that he had to retrace his steps, a process which mortified him and which inspired him with such fear that instead of retreating to the first tenable point, he immediately began a rout so wild that he could not check himself until he had galloped back the entire length of the path of his life, even to the faith of his childhood.

In the depth of his soul he had after all an anchorage which did not fail him, and that was his artistic *ego.* He knew that anyone who had worked as conscientiously as

he had done during a life of trials and tribulations, nobody had a right to stone, even if he had made mistakes. But he had a vital need of letting loose the stream within him—this *panta-rei-stream* of Heraclitus—and it proved a delight to him at this stage to let his skiff passively glide away with the current. He was in need of rest after all his tribulations and disappointments, and he could not get it in any other way—a rest which was at the same time a movement away towards an unknown goal.

The goal which he reached would no doubt have been a different one, more worthy of his former and present self, had he not, during periods of weakness when he ought to have been prevented from anything of the sort, returned to the stuffy little homes down there by the Danube. Those old, religiously stunted crones did doubtless exert a destructive influence upon him just when the state of weakness rendered him most susceptible. Especially did they injure him by fanning to life his self-accusations and by getting him into a greater state of perplexity than was necessary.

During the most serious stage of his Inferno-period, Strindberg kept away from his friends entirely. After he had found out that Przybyszewski had been released from prison, Strindberg's inclination to self-torture received a new impetus. Through a couple of pieces of paper found in the street, he believed himself to have received a message to the effect that Stachu and his wife again had arrived in Paris and that they planned anew to murder him.

Immediately he also suspected Edvard Munch of plotting with them and after one of the sittings for his portrait, Strindberg sent him a mystical post card which obliged Munch to discontinue his calls. It read as follows:

"The last time you called on me, you looked like a murderer or the tool of a murderer.—I only wish to inform you that the Pettenkofer gas-oven in the adjacent room is incapable of being used and is, therefore, unfit for the purpose. Sg."

Shortly after that Strindberg had disappeared from Hotel Orfila. He had tried a couple of times to commit suicide by inhaling hydrocyanate of potash. But on the first occasion a hornet had entered the room buzzing furiously. The second time the bell-boy, who came in and disturbed him in his preparations, saved his life. But one night when he believed himself to be about to be murdered by means of poisonous gases and an electric machine, manipulated by his Polish friend in the adjacent room, he fled from the hotel, away from the death for which he longed so eagerly, but which nobody else than himself was permitted to administer.

No one of us knew where he had gone that scorching hot July day in 1896 when he disappeared. We thought that he had done what he once did in his youth, that he had voluntarily turned himself over to some private asylum for those suffering from mental derangement.

Not until one year later when he made his confession in his book *Inferno,* were we permitted to know that he had remained for a while in Paris in a small hotel near

the Jardin des Plantes, where he passed through another imaginary death-crisis. This in turn forced him to renew his flight. When he arrived in the circle of acquaintances in Dieppe, they believed him to be completely mad. He himself seemed to fear being locked up and accordingly continued his journey to a friend of his, the hospital physician Dr. A. Eliasson at Ystad,[1] who finally took charge of him in earnest.

According to the celebrated German psychiatrist, Dr. S. Rhamner[2], Strindberg's disease was so developed at this time that he ought to have been taken into some asylum. But it is possible that if this had been done contrary to his desire, the disease might have been further aggravated. His most irreconcilable enemies in Sweden have announced as a serious accusation against him, that if he had been shut up in an asylum, he would have gone completely mad. Surely, but many of us who are now regarded as fully sane, would probably have done the same.

Yet it is interesting to know that Dr. Rhamner on scientific grounds considers it safe to affirm that Strindberg's disease *cannot* be classified as paranoia, but rather as melancholy. It was a typical *Melancholia Moralis* with a desire for seclusion, indefinite fear, thoughts of death, suicidal ideas and false notions of guilt. Later on in the further development of the complex of symptoms, there was added praecordial anguish with attacks of

[1] A town in the extreme southern part of Sweden.

[2] See Grenzfragen der Literatur und Medizin, Heft 6. München, 1907.

Raptus Melancholicus accompanied by chimerical imageries and optical illusions. It was, therefore, a typical case of ordinary melancholy which at the height of its development showed itself as *Melancholia Dæmomaniaca.*

Furthermore, Dr. Rhamner points out that it would be a mistake to regard Strindberg's leaning towards mysticism and the occult sciences, found in all his writings, as a pathological sign. Strindberg's mysticism is finally focused in his endeavors to bring about a synthesis between science and religion.

It is different with his pessimism. He has himself tried to explain it as having been caused by his disconsolate childhood and all his sufferings. But these only played the part of sustaining moments, while his nervous constitution and psychic depression constituted the headspring of his ever conspicuous pessimism. Strindberg was born a neuropath.

CHAPTER VI.

The Resurrection of the Dramatist

FROM the sickbed Strindberg rose tried and purified. He employed his convalescence by recording his experiences of the preceding period in the two autobiographical works *Inferno* and *Legends,* and to his religious broodings he said farewell in that magnificent piece of symbolism: *Jacob Wrestles.*

At the same time that he recovered his strength, he matured. He is no longer the fanatic chastiser swinging the knout-whip over himself and his time. He has himself learned from life, and he once more mounts that literary Olympus which had stood vacant during his absence, and becomes the calm, serious-minded teacher who, from the phenomena of antagonizing conflict, points out to mortals those laws of life which have forcibly shaped the course of events.

To be sure he began his new dramatic period with a mystery play, *Advent;* but in his very next work, he is in the midst of the lofty style, in the golden period of his old age. It is in and through his historical dramas that he became the great poet once more.

At this epoch, I again met Strindberg. He had hidden himself down in Lund[1] so securely that not even his

[1] Swedish university town in the southernmost province of Sweden.

address was known. All his correspondence had to pass through the hands of his friend, Waldemar Bülow. A few days before Strindberg was to celebrate his fiftieth birthday, I arrived in Lund in company with a young artist, Arthur Högstedt, who was to illustrate my article concerning the hero of the day.

We had to go to Bülow's editorial office in order to ascertain Strindberg's whereabouts. When we got there, Strindberg himself had already called a couple of times looking for us. As he was busy, he had left word for us to call on him later in his apartment. It was a winter day glorious with sunshine. In Stockholm it had stormed and blown a biting gale the day before, but in the Scanian university city it was as temperate as far down in central Europe. The snow was melting in the streets and in the air there was a feeling of spring.

After a tour through this idyllic country town, we went to Strindberg's place of residence, which was number 14 Tomegapsgatan. Through an archway we came into a yard closed in by buildings on three sides, but on the fourth continuing as a garden plot hemmed in by a fence.

In the small two-storied wing on the right Strindberg had his abode. We mounted a queer little stair and knocked at the door of the celebrity.

A few seconds elapsed before anyone came. Then the door opened slowly, and before us stood Strindberg in such a flood of sunlight that we scarcely could distinguish him. He stood there so ethereally transparent that he might have been taken for a spectre of his own self.

How old he had grown during these years! When I

met him in Paris, he was as yet in his prime, somewhat the worse for all his hardships, but not so as to show age. Now a cheerful, gray-haired old man appeared before us. All that confusion of gray hair pointed straight out in every direction, there was something sunken about his face, and his bearing was not upright and proud as in former years. That he gave me the impression of being so shrivelled up, was no doubt partly due to the fact that he wore a large checkered dressing-gown that fitted him rather loosely. And he came trotting towards us in soft felt-slippers which made him appear somewhat shorter than he was.

In a cheerful and cordial manner he received us and conducted us into his studio, where country-like simplicity ruled supreme. The room was furnished in the old style, old solid furniture with coverings characteristic of a parsonage or the sanctuary of some old maid. Nothing reminded us of Strindberg himself with his exclusive taste, not even the writing table standing diagonally over by the window, with the exception, possibly, of a large pile of manuscript on one end of it, on the wrapper of which Strindberg had written in his own hand: "Drama."

The rays of the sun fell obliquely through the window and lighted up the entire corner in front of the table in such a manner that the room, despite its plainness, put on a cheerful, homelike air.

Strindberg sat down in his large arm-chair by the writing table and his face quivered lightly, as if he were fearful of the questions that we might put to him.

It seemed as though we had not met for a whole generation. At first we were so strange to each other that we were able to talk only about commonplaces. But when he noticed that the feared cross-examination did not materialize, he thawed out and commenced to speak about himself. In reply to my question why he had not returned to his beloved Stockholm, he replied that Lund was his first station in Sweden, where he must enjoy a thorough rest until he had regained his strength. He longed to go to Stockholm, particularly in the summer time, but he dared not go there. He also seemed to have a feeling that the new literary *coterie-constellation* in the capital did not recognize him. The terms *religious and penitent,* of course, do not harmonize with those who preach the gospel of the pleasures and joys of life. —But I feel at home here in Lund, continued Strindberg. Besides, I can be contented anywhere where there is a good library.

Furthermore, in Lund he felt that he was surrounded by such friends as he had need of just now during his period of reconvalescence. He had Bülow, who had taken complete charge of him, when he arrived destitute of everything, and he had a circle of young medical students to associate with and with whom he could discuss those subjects which interested him.

Gradually, however, he had limbered up to such a degree that I considered it safe to try to direct our conversation towards his literary works. As a rule Strindberg never wished to speak of what he was occupied in committing to paper.

—If you speak of it, it slackens your own tension. And you commit yourself by making statements, he used to excuse himself.

But this time, strange to say, he discussed his dramas quite openly. He told of his mystery play, *Advent,* and even gave us a whole mass of details about its contents. It was the beginning of a religious drama, just like those mystery plays which ushered in the golden era of the English drama. Strindberg hoped that the time was not too far distant when a "religious theatre" could be instituted.

The large manuscript pile on the corner of the table, consisting of great square sheets of Lessebo paper, written full in Strindberg's even, careful vertical hand, was the manuscript of *Gustavus Vasa,* the first in a proposed series of historical dramas.

—But when may we expect to see them on the stage? Full of indignation he declared that they would not play his dramas at home. As Sweden's sole dramatist, he ought to have had the privilege of being played. His manuscripts mouldered away in the manuscript cupboards of the theatres. But idiotic, tedious French boulevard-dramas were given.

—And besides, it is impossible for an author continually to write dramas that never are played. Just think how much I could have learned by seeing my own plays on the stage! Just consider to what extent this has arrested my development as a dramatist!

He felt that there was no other solution than for him to start a Strindberg Theatre in Stockholm. But

where could he find a backer for such an enterprise? Yet such a theatre could be arranged for quite reasonably. All that was needed was a small auditorium for only a hundred people, young actors who desired to learn how to act naturally, and decorations of the simplest kind.

Of all the injuries that he had suffered, that seemed to him to be the greatest. Not to be played, he felt as a depreciation of his dramatic talent. And despite the fact that, as we know, eight years later he really got his Strindberg Theatre, the old Intima Theatre at Norra Bantorget, nevertheless, even to the end of his days, he was mortified at seeing some of his most beautiful creations rejected. These were his *Gustavus Adolphus*, his *Nathan der Weise*, as he has called it, his *The Nightingale in Wittenberg*, in which he becomes reconciled with Protestantism as a liberation from heathen Rome and with the local Northgermanic renaissance, and finally his *Gustavus III.*, with which he had hoped that the new Intima Theatre might open its gates to the public in the fall of 1911, although this hope, too, failed him. His little one-act plays which he himself styles descriptions from "cynic life", he did not care so much about. But his resentment at not being permitted to see the three above mentioned dramas acted, he had to take with him to his grave.

After our first meeting with Strindberg in his own apartment, we met him later in the day in Ake Hansson's little restaurant where he had reserved a private room.

He was an entirely different man when we met him there. The appearance of an old man he had laid off

together with the dressing-gown. His hair, to be sure, was just as gray, but in spite of that fact, there was something youthfully dashing about him. Again he got into that attitude and atmosphere of the student, and we sat down at the dinner table like three youngsters who had taken a holiday and were in for a good time.

He had put his religious broodings to flight. Yet, mysticism was his most beloved topic. Soon we were in the midst of it, so deeply, indeed, that for the whole evening we could not get out of it. He told of his experiences, and he was most interested in being informed about ours.

All the little things that occurred round about him he continued to look upon as direct messages from unknown powers with whom he had been in constant communication ever since the sulphur and gold period in Paris. Nowadays, however, he had a feeling of security, for he believed himself to be surrounded mostly by good spirits. He had hardened himself so as to be able to withstand the evil ones. When they revealed themselves, he immediately struck them down.

He read old mediaeval prayer-books in order to enjoy rest and quiet during the evenings. The Bible and Swedenborg he only used as books of reference when he was in doubt and in need of counsel. He would open these books at random, but he always received an answer to what he asked.

In one respect, he was entirely unlike himself. All his bitterness and suspicion had been wiped out of his soul. As the hours passed, he kept drawing closer and closer

to us. He forgot himself in order to become absorbed in our own little sorrows. And when I related Högstedt's sad life and his fruitless endeavors to develop to its full *éclat* that artistic genius which was his, Strindberg vibrated with that warmth of heart of which he was capable but which he mostly kept under control in order to strengthen himself.

He sat there, great, wise and good, and spoke his common sense to us. He became absorbed in two Swedish archetypes whom he loved most of all: those two pairs of characters, Odin (Wadan) and Gustavus Vasa, Odin and Birger Jarl (Birger the Earl). The evening in question, it was the former binary constellation in which he became absorbed. And later, when I read his drama *Gustavus Vasa,* I was able to understand how much of himself he had put into the character of the old king.

He felt like a Gustavus Vasa of his own time. He had united the indifferent masses about their own great interests, he had made them oust the devilkins from the Principality of Cunning, and built up a new spiritual-intellectual kingdom for both Swedish gentry and peasantry. He ruled somewhat too autocratically, but he considered himself forced to do this, lest they (the people) should relapse into that dangerous state of decrepitude into which they had been lulled by the Union[1].

All good minds in the nation were to unite with him and back his own good mind and will, and those who were

[1] The so-called Kalmar Union effected by Queen Margaret and embracing Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

indisposed to do so would reap the same reward as the Dalecarlians, when they opposed Gustavus. But it was not only a pile of blood-stained Dalecarlian coats[2] that were being carried into the presence of the angry king, whose heart was strong enough to see the blood of his former friends and supporters being spilled, it was just as much Strindberg's former friends up there in the Swedish capital, those who rebelled against him and tried to dethrone him, at whom he flung a word of warning with the blood-stained white sheepskin coats.

How strong the poet had grown by becoming absorbed in this Gustavus Vasa-character, surrounded by the mythological glimmer of Northern antiquity! He reviewed life with that trustfulness which restores the vigor of the doubting soul, and he looked far, far into the future, where he saw a Sweden—which, if it followed his judicious counsel—would have strength enough to emerge victoriously out of the world-conflagration which he knew would come.

Strindberg felt that in him and through him the Swedish spirit had once more united into a new powerful character counting its lineage directly from those Swedes of old who after death were raised to the rank of divinities.

But just that character of divinity was as repugnant

[2] Allusion to a scene in Gustavus Vasa. The leaders of the stubborn, rebellious Dalecarlians are awaiting an audience with the king. Presently they are called out one after the other. But they do not return. After a while a messenger brings in some blood-stained sheep-skin coats which he throws down before those whose turn has not yet come to appear before the king.

to him as the fool's cap and bells, or again, an object of as much indifference as the ermine robe; it was the humanly personal in Father Odin—the only one who had drunk wisdom out of the well of Mimer,[1] and in Gustavus Vasa—the Founder of the kingdom—he admired and loved.

Without in the least suspecting it, he assumed greater proportions in my eyes that evening than ever before. I felt that such a man had the right to demand that the world should not pass him over in silence, as they had endeavored to do in Stockholm; that the entire following generation was a young forest which never would grow up even to the lower branches of his gigantic crown and thus constituted an obstruction, inasmuch as it masked the giant from the human procession which advanced on the hollow road through the forest.

If the people at that time had been permitted to see him freely, they ought to have awakened much earlier to that consciousness which is the beginning of the development of character, and have felt that mighty, intellectual uplift, which the contemplation of the life's work of a man like Strindberg can inspire.

That night we remained together until after twelve o'clock. Strindberg had become more and more cheery. That dull despair—the feeling of being ostracized, a *Pariah*—which at first I thought lay like a sediment at the bottom of everything he said, was gone. He thawed

[1] Mimer, a giant, was the creator of the ocean and the primaeval source of wisdom. To get a drink out of Mimer's well, Wodan pledged one of his eyes. (Mythol).

out because of the fact that there were human beings who believed in him and who expected nothing short of miracles of him. This had given him courage to let go of himself in such a manner as, presumably, he did not wish to do among the indifferent high priests of the exact sciences.

He continued to brighten up until he looked like one of those fair-haired, curly-headed, good-natured children who are a proof, it seems to me, that humanity has at least one goal for which to strive. But in the midst of this clear, congenial atmosphere, another sorrow caused poisonous flowers to unfold in his soul. It was again the regret that some of his dramas had not been played.

He was suddenly seized with palpitation of the heart, and we had to leave immediately.

—My heart warns me when I stay out too long. Now I must walk half an hour in the open, quite slowly, in order to get my balance so that I may be able to sleep during the night. Are you coming along?

We started out into the night, a cold winter night with a dark-blue sky and glittering stars. The little city slept quietly under a covering of black and white. We wandered towards the outskirts where the houses were small, low huts among which Strindberg strode like a giant.

The broad brim of the felt hat cast a shadow over his face. Then suddenly there was a shooting-star. He tossed his head back and looked skyward as though he were trying to penetrate into a secret.

He stopped. And when I turned around, I saw the spying, far-piercing look characteristic of one who has a vision, or lets his thoughts advance far into the future. But it was only with one eye he looked far, far into space. Was it the Monoptic One who stood by my side?[1]

[1] In the Norse mythology, Odin (Wodan) was the father of all things created. He was one-eyed.

CHAPTER VII.

The Poet and the Wolves

NO one here in our cramped city can walk his way straight ahead in proud loneliness, as Strindberg has done, without arousing ill-will and anger among those whose fate it has been to dwell in the kind of spiritual atmosphere, where everything personal, everything that makes you a living being, has been blotted out.

During his long wanderings, Strindberg has, therefore, ever had a flock of those hungry wolves on his heels. In his early adolescence it was the literary "wise" old fogeys whose anger he aroused and who scorned and furiously lashed this overbearing youngster who, in *The Outlaw* did not shrink from confessing that his aspiration was to become a poet. This was the very worst offense, for none of the literary old fogeys had succeeded in spite of the fact that they had all written verse in their youth.

In the beginning Strindberg allowed the brutal fangs of all these attackers to tear away at his bleeding breast. How could one but be deeply stirred when reading in Strindberg's autobiography how one evening in Uppsala,

his own Runa-friends[1] obliged him to read an article full of gibes and sneers in the hateful *Evening Journal*—an organ which persecuted him all his life—in which his first drama appearing in print was the object of "flagellation and mockery." He says that involuntarily he had to confess that the paper spoke the truth, but also that it "worked him up terribly."

He felt that he was exposed, outwitted, lured into the open. But what he could not as yet see and claim indemnity for, was that the exposer, who hid behind the words, was a brutal little dwarf, who wielded the scourge in retaliation for torments that he himself had formerly suffered, the shadow of a human being who hated to see new vigorous shoots grow on the old tree. No good, noble-minded man can take the executioner's axe in his hand; that is the office of those who are predestined to criminal existence, but whom some lucky chance has rescued from the dangerous road.

To expose in that manner a young promising poet in all his nakedness, to show him fraught with the defects of which even the most perfect human being is possessed, bears witness to such moral baseness that one is taken aback at finding it in the so-called high places of culture, among those of the highest university education, among the foremost and most trusted men of the state.

Only nine years later, in 1879, when Strindberg had

[1] Runa (Rune), the name of a literary society founded by Strindberg and two of his student friends at the University of Uppsala. It dates from the 28th of Feb., 1870. Membership was limited to nine. (Uddgren. Boken om Strindberg, p. 68).

published his social novel *The Red Room,* which to a certain extent had been inspired by Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield,* he learned how to see through "the relative invalidity of criticism" and bravely decided never again to read the critique of his own works.

He then declared that he had realized that individuals on the same cultural level have identical opinions in identical things, that their opinions, judgment and critique in general are caused automatically by involuntary activities of their brains.

This resolve not to read what was written about himself and his works, Strindberg lived up to for the rest of his life. And because of his great sense of equity, he did not wish to read even good criticism, inasmuch as he did not pay any attention to unfavorable criticism of himself and his works. Through this course of conduct he doubtless escaped many a bitter hour and unnecessary sufferings, for it is a fact that no Swedish poet has been waited on by his countrymen with so much uncalled for scorn, so much rabidness, so many false accusations, as Strindberg.

* * * * * *

When Strindberg, after having passed his fiftieth milestone, felt that he had enough power of resistance to go into the snake-pit, and came up to Stockholm with three such dramas as *Gustavus Vasa, The Folkungar*[1] and *Eric XIV.,* you might have expected that the new literary generation, which during his long sojourn in foreign lands had grown up at home, would have greeted his

[1] The Dynasty of Swedish rulers (1250-1363).

return with joy. He came in the quality of conqueror, not in a triumphal chariot to be sure, but rather on foot; yet he came with that glory about himself which reminds you of the crusader who was part of the forces which endeavored to recapture the Holy Sepulchre.

Strindberg was received in ice-cold silence. He had been regarded as dead, as a great departed one, to whom sometimes you offer a flower of remembrance, but with whom you are no more anxious to dine than with a skeleton.

New constellations had originated since his star had set in the south, after he had settled down to a hermit-life in the sign of the Southern Cross and Sirius. Venus and Mars, nay, the whole Milky Way grew pale in terror and envy when this brilliant, gigantic comet rose over the horizon and blazed a wide, glittering white way across the firmament from south to north, eclipsing both fixed stars and planets.[1]

The situation of the little twinkling stars was very unpleasant; this cannot be denied. They had been about to grow large and mighty. The people had become accustomed to finding their way at night by their somewhat faint glow, but now all this was of the past, because of this wonder of the heavens who turned night into broad daylight.

Furthermore, the whole nation had grown tired of the great conflicts of life, of the great campaigning in newly

[1] Uddgren here refers to certain prominent contemporary Swedish writers and C. D. af Wirsén who fought Realism and Naturalism of which Strindberg had once been the chief representative in Sweden.

acquired territories which Strindberg continually had made us pass through. A feeling of joy had seized the people at being at their own firesides once more, and it had been ascertained through certain comparisons that what we lacked most of all at home was—happiness.

We lacked it, and yet we had already been favored with it. Strindberg had created it in his new, great dramatic art, but it was a joy or happiness for the physically strong, not for weaklings. And since the people as yet were weak after all the nursery diseases, they could not stand the genuine joy of mighty emotions. They wanted a fitting amount of joy-in-life, and this it was that the poets of the nineties tried to give them.

Those who were moderately desirous of happiness got exactly what they wanted. They were permitted to rejoice in the fact that Mars, Venus, Sirius and the rest of them celebrated nuptials in the classic style, in which, however, the masquerade costumes were the only things that imitated antiquity.

But what about spiritual sustenance? That they did not dare to share with anybody else. If they had any of their own, they kept it for themselves. For there was no spiritual joy in Sirius' announcement that love is beautiful only when it is old and decrepit. In what way did Mars think that he could increase our happiness by describing how the steadfast Carolinians,[1] to no avail, were permitted to freeze to death in foreign lands? Of what remarkable kind of happiness did Venus intend to be the protégée when she proclaimed that the women

[1] The soldiers of Charles XII., (1697-1718).

should be shut up in the temple while the men were to stand outside in the rain?

The intensely sad aspect of the yelping of the poets of the nineties against Strindberg is, that they did not realize that Strindberg like themselves was fighting for the new syntheses that were destined to be built up on the sites where Strindberg some time in the eighties had torn down all the hovels which a perverted real estate policy had wished to keep in order to create artificially inflated rents, precisely as it had happened in practical life at that time within the precincts of our own Stockholm.

The young "happiness-enthusiasts" wanted to oust the "grudge", a something which did not exist in Strindberg, but indeed in those sour, drawling parasites who had claimed to be followers of Strindberg. They worshipped beauty and hated word-squabbles, but they forgot that the beauty of battle is the highest beauty, and that joy in life cannot be obtained without sacrifice.

What posterity will judge them hardest for is, that they did not see that Strindberg's progress of penance and self-redemption offered much more beauty—whether considered from an aesthetic or purely human point of view—than their own tourist trips to Rome and Babylon. They had lost all genuine religious sentiment, all desire to attain to great ideals, and therefore they could not understand Strindberg's violent longings to satisfy his religious needs, to find new syntheses which were to fuse the knowledge of the times with an emancipated religion. If they had felt and understood this, it ought to have been possible for them to have forbearance with Strindberg's

excess in word and deed and instead of committing acts of injustice to look into his soul, where the indestructible skeptic still had his abode and continually brought new fuel to the flame of doubt.

The reason why Strindberg aimed at building loftier and wider arches than they, is to be sought in the extraordinary mental faculties of the man. If it pleased the giant to play with historic puppets and to place them in a row so that it might seem as though there was some relation between them, this ought not to have caused such outbursts of anger among those who, after all, were indebted to him for so many other favors.

The sore point in their attack on Strindberg was, furthermore, that they felt much displeased at Strindberg's strong religious longing. This had a painful effect upon them, seemed to them like a poison which they thought they had eliminated, but which reappeared. In this they reveal their own coarse conception of life, confess that they are void of every higher spiritual need, that the religious sentiment is repulsive to them, nay, that they have no perception of a world-will in general.

In their longing for classic beauty, they ought to have turned to Epicurus who was so unjustly blackened by dogmatic Christianity. What great wisdom might they not have received from him! He, the great unrecognized individualist of antiquity, would have possessed the power to show them the wrong in their yelping against Strindberg. Yes, even he!

Finally, if they had not become dazzled and blinded so suddenly by seeing everything in red, when they looked

at Strindberg, they might have realized that the aged poet had placed himself at the head of the only dangerous by-path, that he covered it so completely that, indirectly on this account, he had become the most reliable guide for those who wished to find a way to the new Land of Promise. To hate him for this is equal to not understanding one's own welfare.

After the great success with *Gustavus Vasa* and *Eric XIV.* in the Swedish Theatre,[1] the great defeat of *The Folkungar* followed. In this latter play the literary critics had finally got hold of a work of Strindberg, out of which a capital slaughter could properly be instituted. This took place according to all rules and regulations of the craft, so that when the execution was over there was not a shred left of the whole play. Strindberg had occupied the pedestal after Gustavus Vasa; already in his lifetime he had seen that spiritual statue of honor which Parliament later refused him in so far as its material form is concerned; but after the slaughter of *The Folkungar,* his statue of honor as well as "his loftiest work"—as one unbiased critic expressed himself— lay crumbling in the dust.

That the poet after this cruel injustice—quite comparable to the act of high-treason which the Dramatic Theatre committed against him in his youth through the rejection of *Master Olof*—withdrew into his shell and decided to lead the life of a hermit, should not prove a surprise to anybody. And if his soul gradually stored up

[1] The name of one of the theatres in Stockholm. Cf. Theatre Francaise.

a great deal of hatred against the ruling literary *coterie* at home, this fact cannot be characterized in any other way than as humanly justifiable. It would have been more than inhuman, if he had remained silent and not allowed his great indignation to explode.

During the years following the annihilation of *The Folkungar,* the whole literary clique of the capital—any provincial critique, unfortunately, we never have had—tried as effectively as possible to kill Strindberg by unbroken silence. That was the manner in which the long series of historical dramas were killed. Only *Gustavus Adolphus* they held on to, since with regard to this play the yelping could still be continued. They howled like wolves at Skansen,[1] because under Strindberg's treatment, Gustavus Adolphus had lost his saintly halo; instead he had become a great and good human being whom Strindberg himself compares with *Nathan the Wise.* Not even from a scenic point of view did *Gustavus Adolphus* amount to anything. In fact, the petty critique dares to assert this even to this day, in spite of the fact that some of Europe's foremost critics have proved the opposite.

His dream-play dramas Strindberg was not able to publish for several years, and much less was he able to have them performed, except *Easter* which was played in the Dramatic Theatre.

Strindberg's exceedingly charming picture of himself in old age, *Alone,* in which he shows himself as com-

[1] The famous Zoo at Djurgarden (The Deer-garden) to the east of the city proper.

pletely recovered from his sickness, the critics could not appreciate. His *The Gothic Rooms,* they ridiculed, declaring that it never could equal *The Red Room.* This irritated Strindberg more than any other one thing and only the year before his death, he read *The Gothic Rooms* and declared time and time again to his friends that he himself placed it at the head of all his novels.

New Swedish Destinies experienced a similar treatment. The beautiful descriptions of the skerries, *Beauty Cove and Shame Sound*[1] only caused disgust among the delicate literary gourmands. And finally when Strindberg published his large collection of poems containing some of the most remarkable lyric creations in the Swedish language, the critics kept perfect silence as though the poet had committed some unseemly act.

He who has followed the brutal course of injustice against the poet during all these years, he who has seen the coterie-critique hammer him down inch by inch until that statue of gold, which once was his, became telescoped into itself to such an extent as to present nothing but the flatness of a penny—he who has seen all that and understood the purpose, must confess, if he has any sense of justice, that Strindberg's "reckoning with the *Decadence* poets" in *Black Flags* was not only fully justifiable, but indeed a demand which the epoch had made upon him.

Strindberg had to defend himself against the parasites

[1] Happily rendered Fairhaven and Foulstrand by L. Lind af Hageby in: Strindberg, The Spirit of Revolt, etc., Appleton & Co., New York, 1913.

round about him. The ruling *coterie*-spirit had wrought a stupor in the literary self-consciousness, so that there was no one who could see the difference any longer between a vagabond and a nobleman. One of the cleanest and most honorable of artists in our country once declared to me, that he considered it a godsend that Strindberg set the axe to the root of the tree, thus exposing the degenerate progeny who tried to tell the people that they were following in Strindberg's foot-steps.

Apart from this, Strindberg created with his *Black Flags* a satirical work of art which is destined to live through centuries. The much discussed literary character is a masterly drawn type, who in company with Sir John Falstaff and Pickwick Esqr., is bound to enter eternity. The rancorous severity with which the character in question is drawn, is based on a personal hatred, which seems exaggerated, but without just that amount of sharpness in the tone, the type never would have become so striking as it is. At the present time, we ought to be able to forget that Strindberg used a model to a certain extent. As a rule, the characters of the book are compounded of the specific qualities of two or three models. Hence they differ considerably from their prototypes and cannot be designated by this or that name. The same is true as regards the majority of the characters of the *Red Room*, and Strindberg did not want the artists of the *Red Room* to be called by their right names, in spite of the fact that they were sympathetically drawn throughout.

When *Black Flags* was about to be published, Strind-

berg had to suffer humiliation at the hands of the publishers who had entered into a conspiracy to prevent the publication of the work. They formed a testudinal bulwark about the attacked one who ought to have been allowed to look after his own business. When did you, noble souls, form a bulwark about Strindberg when he fought for a just cause and when the assassin time and time again left him for dead in the arena? To fail the Lord of the Land when he was in danger of his life, used to be called by an odious name, and was punished by breaking on the wheel, but in our days, it seems to have become a sort of meritorious deed which may even be the cause of reward.

Strindberg was able at last to have his *Black Flags* published thanks to the fact that there was *one* man among the publishers who had not entered into the conspiracy and who dared to challenge the hydra.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Eccentric Hermit

AFTER the mental and physical illnesses and sufferings with which the old century closed for him, the ever hypersensitive Strindberg had become even more sensitive and delicate. Although the mental disorder had been overcome, he had the mania of his Inferno-period, in that he insisted upon seeing direct evidence of the supernatural powers in every incident, nay the least trifle, that graced his eyes.

His constant planning to shut himself up in a Catholic monastery was thus caused by a desire to get away from the painful external world, not by any newly aroused religious inclination inducing him to throw himself into the arms of the Roman church.

Since for many reasons he considered himself unfit for the monastery, he hit upon the idea of establishing himself as a "private hermit" right in the midst of the Swedish capital. This isolation of his he put into effect shortly after he had moved up there in 1899. Previously he had lived for a short time at Furusund.[1]

At first he had hunted up his old friends and comrades, but he soon found that associating with them had no charm for him. He rediscovered himself only when he returned home to his seclusion and quiet and became

[1] A watering place in the Stockholm Archipelago.

"wrapped up in his own spiritual atmosphere, in which he felt at home as in a well-made suit of clothes."

Thus on the border-line of old age Strindberg's hermit life, extending nearly over thirteen years, began by "his exercising himself in the art of being alone." In the beginning it was difficult, and he himself confessed that the vacuum which held him, insisted upon being filled up.

In his wonderfully charming autobiography *Alone*, Strindberg expresses a few thoughts which I cannot but cite: "By cutting off the contact with other people, I seemed at first to lose in power, but simultaneously my *ego* began to crystallize as it were, to condense around a kernel wherein everything that I had lived through, united, fused and became absorbed as nourishment of my soul. Besides this, I accustomed myself to turn over in my mind everything I saw and heard, in the house, in the street, in nature, and by bringing everything that came to my notice into the work in hand, I felt my capital grow, and the observations that I made in my loneliness were found to be more valuable than those which I had made in society."

These words seem to me to be the motto of all that Strindberg wrote during the first decade of the new century. It was, thanks to his complete isolation, during these years that Strindberg gathered all the material which makes his latest literary output so intimate and which enables us to come closer to him, personally, than ever before.

What beautiful descriptions of the peacefulness of a home where everything lives and breathes, suffers and

rejoices together with him who dwells within, these years have given us! His novels as well as his dramas and poetry from this period are full of the music of every day life which the hermit Strindberg grasped as no other.

In this peaceful retirement he thrived as never before in his own city. His literary activity as well as he himself here passed their fourth spring. Sorrows and worries he changed into white summer clouds which glided away on the first breeze.

Yet a cloud, dark-blue and threatening, continually hung over his head. After the annihilation of *The Folkungar,* the theatres were afraid of his dramas. Against the new dramatic style, somewhat after the pattern of Maeterlinck which he had commenced in *Easter* and continued in *Swanwhite, The Crown Bride* and *The Dream Play,* the directors of the theatres assumed a skeptical attitude, considering the plays to be too artistic, too exclusive for the appreciative powers of the general public.

In the month of December, 1900, Strindberg wrote me to the effect that I must see him in an important business matter. Unfortunately I was sick and could not put in an appearance in his bachelor quarters, 31 Banérgatan, until one week later.

It was the question of starting a Strindberg Theatre. It hurt him terribly to write drama after drama and not see a single one on the stage. This underrating of his capacity as dramatist must not go on *ad infinitum.* In order to put a stop to it, he wanted me to help him start a Strindberg Theatre.

To my question as to what plays we were to put on, he answered that there was a whole series of short mystic plays which he had written. It was to be a theatre in the Maeterlinck style, not in the style of the past. We needed only a barn or the like at Djurgarden (The Deer-garden). No money would have to be spent on decorations, we could play as in the Shakespeare theatre of yore, in a room with bare walls. The contents of the plays would thus come to the fore much better.

Without in the least suspecting that I might hurt his feelings, I happened, during the course of our conversation, to ask him whether I might not read the plays we were to produce. —No, you will not! he replied in an irritated tone of voice. —But if I am to stage them, I certainly will have to read them, in order to ascertain that they are not beyond my powers. —I never permit anybody to read what I write.

After this categorical imperative of the author, all the plans proposed came to a sudden stop for the time being. It was not my intention to hurt Strindberg by suggesting fears that his plays might not be fit for the stage; it was only doubt as to my own limited ability, in case that I was to make my debut as stage-director that gave rise to my question.

No explanations on my part were of any avail. My request to be permitted to read his new dramas had wounded Strindberg so deeply that he dropped all his plans. He was hard and cold as only Strindberg could be, and when I left him, I felt that we would not see each other for a long time.

I cite this incident, not as a criticism of Strindberg, but only in order to show how utterly sensitive he was, to show how this hypersensibility was coupled with an hysteric suspicion which, out of most innocent words, would construe, very unreasonably, non-existent secret intentions of which he surely could not discover a trace in the deepest recesses of the subconscious will of the individual.

He himself spoke of this "pathological" suspicion of his of which he showed the symptoms even in his childhood. It has followed him all through life and has become, it seems to me, the main spring of that equally incurable scepticism of his. And yet, it was thanks to this constant ability to be doubtful of all those ideas which he had taken up to analyze, that he had escaped the fate of becoming wedded to any one of them. Opinions exist only in order to illumine life spontaneously from a certain side. Unless they are broken up immediately and unless you permit their being replaced by others, you will soon see everything upside down again.

The same peculiar suspicion which Strindberg showed me on this occasion, he probably showed everybody. It was not difficult for him to become isolated under such circumstances.

Just at the time when Strindberg had that calm about himself which he needed, he chanced to fall in love in earnest. He married the young actress Harriet Bosse whose acquaintance he made while she was taking the part of "the girl" in his play *Easter*. During their three years of married life (1901—1904), I never saw Strind-

berg. But I know that during these years were written some of his greatest works, his double drama *The Dance of Death* and his new poems *Word-Play and Petty Art.*[1] His greatest lyric poem, *Chrysaetos,* owes its existence to this marriage.

Divorced for the third time, he now dwelt alone in the small, plain home he had built up in the large Red House, 40 Karlavägen. Four flights up on the right was Strindberg's apartment. When entering the hall, there hung directly in front of you a small oil-painting by himself. Through a framework of foliage, you looked into a sunny Eden. It was as if this little picture would warn the caller that he was approaching tabooed ground. The door on the left led to his studio. This was a comparatively small room, obloing in shape and with a single window facing the north. The whole wall on the left was covered with book-shelves reaching from floor to ceiling. On the right there stood a couple of manuscript cupboards and on the highest one of these, an eagle spread his wings.

Diagonally by the window there was the writing table full of note-books, manuscripts, etc., and a few trinkets, all arranged in the minute order which Strindberg wanted about himself when he worked. At the table there stood that high-backed arm-chair which he occupies in the photographs of that period taken by Anton Blomberg. Close by the book-shelves there was a smoking-table and a couple of rattan chairs for callers.

Double-doors led to the dining-room. This room

[1] Word Play and Handicraft. Lind and Hageby, op. cit.

also was quite plain, with a dining-table in the centre, a serving table and an arm-chair in the corner on the right by the window. As a rule there was a wealth of flowers on both these tables, flowers that were sent by unknown admirers, or bought by himself during his morning walks.

These flowers he always arranged personally in such a way that they harmonized with the state of mind in which he happened to be. When he was in a solemn frame of mind, he also spread out on chairs and tables some beautiful, embroidered East Indian draperies. On a pillar between the windows, he had placed a small statue of Buddah.

The adjoining room was his drawing-room. It looked as though it was not in use. The slender-legged furniture had on light coverings both winter and summer. There were no pictures on the walls, only small and large photographs of his children.

His bedroom, finally, was situated in the rear of the house. It was so plain that it impressed the caller as a monastic cell. A narrow iron bedstead, a large photograph of his youngest daughter, little Anne-Marie, a small table with an old Bible, a couple of old Catholic prayer-books—that was all.

This is the home which he himself describes in the latter part of *Alone*. Here he passed his time during the years 1902—1908, and here he wrote most of what he published during those years.

The windows faced north-east, so that he had no sun in his rooms except early in the morning, and not at all

in the winter time. He had an extensive view of "Gärdet"[1] and The Royal Citadel ever towards Lilla Värtan and Lidingön.[2] And then he had all of the northern sky which he loved to contemplate during the long winter evenings, while he was moving about alone, waiting for the hours of rest to come and liberate him from the worries of the day.

He scarcely left this home of his except during his walks between the hours of seven and nine in the morning. He made his morning coffee himself and ate a couple of pieces of bread before he started out. When he returned from his long walk to "Djurgarden" all wet with perspiration, he changed his clothes and seated himself at his desk.

As on the previous day he had made some annotations as to what he was to begin with on the following day, and since, furthermore, he had gathered additional material during his walk, he always came to his desk so well charged that as soon as he had put his pen to the paper, the work began under high pressure.

Printing the words in the beautiful, steady hand, which is characteristic of the manuscripts of his younger years, he thus labored for two or three hours.

—I dare not write any more at a time, he explained, although I usually feel like going on. But if I write for four or five hours, I become exhausted and feel such a strong disgust that I wish I could commit suicide.

[1] Literally "The Field." Extensive drillgrounds to the N. E. of the city.

[2] A large island separated from the mainland by the fjord of Värtan.

The rest of the day he had to be occupied with other things. Under the seemingly quiet exterior, he felt a constant, burning restlessness which forced him to be occupied with studies and research of all kinds, if for no other reason than to make the time pass. Here in the Red House it was the preliminary studies to the *Blue Books* he was concerned with, mainly speculations in chemistry and astronomy. But he was also concerned with some quasi-scientific research works in the history of religion, for which he harbored a glowing hatred because it seemed to him that their aim was to show that the Bible could be traced to Babel and that, by means of scientific evidence, they tried to detract from the worth of revealed truth. There were quite a number of things that he hated in his old age. He was continually the same brilliant reasoner as when in his younger days he used to be called "the Eagle" by his friends in Berns.[1] The only difference was that at that time he was wrecking and tearing down *the then passing state of things,* now he was raging against the *new and permanent status quo* which was incompatible with the faith of his childhood to which he had returned. In the nineties, modern science had declared that the universe no longer had any secrets for it. It had found the key to all riddles, solved all problems.

It was the boastful language of these quasi-scientific *high-brows* that continually embittered Strindberg and caused him to treat the exact sciences with so much contempt. But these were statements which no real prom-

[1] Berns Salonger, see p. 8, chapt. IV.

inent scientists had made, for they no doubt continue to hold, that, as regards the great secrets, we know practically nothing more than *plus, minus, zero.*

But on account of a few scientific snobs, Strindberg condemned them all. Besides, in matters pertaining to this kind of knowledge, he wanted to play the part of the clairvoyant. With an eagerness, which bordered on light hysteria, he seized upon a misunderstood statement now and then, turned and twisted in the vise of his own imagination, until he had put an entirely different interpretation upon it than it originally had, and finally in that way he was able to produce a "fictitious fact" which he would be delighted to use later on as a crushing argument.

There was nothing to which he clung so tenaciously as to these facts of his own making. It was as if he believed, that in this ever flowing stream, there would be a few firm points that could give him a feeling of quiet, and therefore he moored his skiff to a couple of floating buoys, without ascertaining whether they were fastened to the bottom or not. When conversing with him, it was imperative to refrain from touching upon these buoys. This put a damper on his spirits, nay, he would even lose his temper and show his guests the door, if they contradicted him too vigorously. In particular he clung to his mystic discovery concerning the birds, e. g. the landrail which can make itself invisible, the swallows which hibernate, and regarding the whereabouts in general of the migratory birds during the winter. He hinted vaguely premonitions which he did not wish to express. These

were mystic secrets which it might be dangerous to betray.

These oddities often suggested to me that he wanted them as a kind of safety-valve against the state of infirmity through which he had had to fight his way. He referred to them as it were to test his self-control, the signal superiority of his own brain over illusions.

And his new religious inclinations? After he had settled down in the Red House, he had once more passed through a rather serious crisis which closed with perfect harmony between him and the supernatural powers. This was the final act in his great and marvelous self-redemption. He had now granted himself complete absolution and balanced the books in such a way that they could be passed upon favorably by the Tribunal above as well as by himself.

Such a closing of the books ought not to have been difficult to bring about, not even for a man with his own strong sense of justice. The very fact that he had again awakened among us the old-Swedish spirit, the very same spirit which moved in the loftiest of the old Icelandic poetry, the most inspiring, the most stimulating of all "this desperate defiance of the impelling power and meaninglessness of life"—Vilhelm Ekelund[1] puts it—this fact alone ought to have sufficed to allow "the sins", which he possibly had committed, to be carried away by the wind like withered leaves to the pit where they were destined to decompose of their own accord.

During the last few years I met Strindberg, his relig-

[1] Swedish poet.

ious life impressed me as an attractive, gentle pose which he desired to assume in order to have the external peace of which he was in need. His battles with himself had been so consuming that, when he rose to his feet again, he was not able to follow up the syntheses of which he had already found the indications, but rather felt the need of embracing almost any doctrine in order to get out of the chaos of religious brooding.

Already his statement, that a man had to swallow the entire Christian dogma, just as we swallow a quantity of castor oil in a mouthful of coffee, demonstrates what an aversion he had for this dogmatic conception of religion. At the final settlement, after his religious self-examination in *Legends,* he directs in several instances the very sharpest criticism against Christianity, and particularly against its weakest point: the dumping of the moral responsibility upon the Saviour. His own self-redemption—as Esswein points out—was not the weary crawling to the cross of a symbolist, nothing that might be called a conversion, but rather a *regeneration* into which there entered to be sure a mighty displeasure at the base qualities of some of the modern free-thinking.

Esswein makes the following plain statement: "Even Strindberg, the religious, the man with the melancholy catholicizing trifles, recorded in *Legends,* is a skeptic to the end. A puzzler over problems through and through, a believer with whom every church would be glad to have nothing to do, and yet, deeply religious."

It was, in so far as I am able to ascertain, in order again to liberate the artist within him that he slipped on

the cloak of Christian dogma, which fits loosely or snugly at the same time. He felt himself to be a descendant of Vasa who had not fallen at Lützen, but returned home after bloody battles, to create order in the confusion which was the result of his long absence on expeditions in foreign lands.

He believed no longer in absolute evolution. Several times he declared:

—I do not believe that life ever will be anything else than it is. This is the worst of all hells. I cannot conceive of any worse. Even if you change the form of government and religion ever so many times, humanity will always remain the same.

He felt that he had to comfort not only himself but also his times. Every night he read his old Roman Catholic prayer-books in order to become inbued with their peace, not to acquire a Roman Catholic edification, and in the same way he wanted to comfort others. The fire which burned within him was so strong that he needed quieting remedies in order to rest at night.

If we turn to his literary records we find that not even through these can he be marshalled into the ranks of the church Christians. No *convert* bids such a farewell to his own brethren as did Strindberg in his *Black Flags.* On the contrary, the ego-centric which dwells within him, remains there even to the end. When in *The Great Highway* he definitely lays down the pen, he rises up like the wrestling Jacob against God and endeavors to overwhelm him:

I'll not let go thy hand, Eternal One,

Thy mighty hand, until I'm blessed by Thee.

And then he bursts out in these accents which testify to an unbroken self-esteem:

Bless me, thine own humanity,
Which suffers, suffers from thy gift of life!
Me first who suffered most!

These words: "Me, thy humanity," and "Me first, who suffered most," do not proceed from the lips of a man who has languished under the burden of life and laid his cross on the shoulders of another, but rather from a blond giant of the Viking-type who personally has carried the cross to his own Calvary, and who claims a reward for it. That he had not been able to be what he had wished to be—the closing word in the drama—does not detract from the proud self-assertion in the consciousness of the greatness of his life's work.

If we wish to hear Strindberg speak from his heart in an even stronger tone, we need only read his words to the Japanese on the latter's question as to "how he sees life":

The Hunter: This found I bitterer than death, indeed,
To take this monstrous mockery in earnest—
To hold as sacred that which was so beastly.

CHAPTER IX.

Little Christmas Eve[1] With Strindberg

STRINDBERG had finally set up his own theatre, but under such great difficulties that it seemed as though all the powers of the world had conspired against him lest in the end he should bring his unplayed dramas on the stage.

When the theatre, the old Intima Theatre at Norra Bantorget, was to be opened, it took months before the sanction of the authorities could be obtained and before all the necessary changes were completed. As Strindberg was strongly opposed to director Falck's and his company's going on a tour through the country, he was obliged to pay their salaries for more than two months. And when on the 26th of November 1907 the theatre finally opened its gates and that forceful masterpiece *The Pelican,* a play expressly written for the occasion, was given as a première, there rose in unison a lupine howl against both the play and the author, loudest against himself, perhaps, but not so much against *the dramatist* as against *the author of —Black Flags.*

They did not consider that it was Sweden's first and only great dramatist who now himself sought to make good the wrongs done him, that it was the author himself who had to pay the piper. The Intima Theatre was to be

[1] The Swedes so designate the 23rd of December.

clubbed to death at any price. Subsequent *premières* were given with altogether too few rehearsals and they were failures too. At once, after the first rout, Strindberg wanted to give up and close the theatre. He, the bravest among the brave, had now in old age become timorous. With laudable energy, partly the result of circumstances, director Falck stuck to the enterprise. Towards Christmas, however, the difficulties became altogether too great, and unless there had been a contribution to the funds, the enterprise would in all human probability have failed. Little Christmas Eve, the 23rd of December, in the morning, the reef was cleared. Greatly rejoicing on this account, Strindberg invited his director and myself to celebrate the event with a spree in his home.

Those who came to Strindberg for an evening call, had to be there precisely at seven. To put in an appearance earlier meant an interruption in his preparations; if one arrived a little after the appointed hour his nerves suffered, because of his having to wait, and he considered the evening wasted.

Accordingly we two, who had been invited that evening, met in the hall of his residence where we waited until the clock struck seven.

When we heard the first stroke in the Oscar church-tower, we rang the bell. His house-keeper as usual peeped out of the kitchen in order to ascertain whether it was some *persona grata* that had pressed the button. If that was the case, she only nodded contentedly and closed the door, and then there followed a rather lengthy

artistic pause. Without our having heard her steps, she now opened quite unexpectedly the hall door, and so silently that you had the feeling you had come to some spiritualistic *séance* in the house of the magian Magus.

While we took off our coats and peeped into *The Promised Land,* a little Strindberg painting on the opposite wall, the door to Strindberg's library was opened and on the threshold stood Strindberg himself. He stood there in a flood of light, for his apartment was fully illumined by electricity as he always had it during the winter evening, even when he was alone.

—Well, you are on the dot! he said with a smile, an expression which was equal to the very highest praise.

Then in due order he offered us his hand, his good powerful hand which cordially pressed ours as a greeting of welcome. As a rule Strindberg avoided shaking hands with people, for on the inside of his right hand he had a spot of eczema which one could not help feeling and of which Strindberg was very loath to speak. At times the spot was inflamed and then Strindberg continually wore a black cotton glove on the right hand. How he supposed that he got this skin-disease, he relates in his autobiography.

After we had entered his little library, he closed the door carefully behind us, and with a great gesture pulled a drapery in front of it in order that nobody should be able to peep through the key-hole or to hear what was said within the Holy of Holies.

Thereupon he turned to us in a gay, student-like manner which meant, though no word was spoken, that now

we might cut loose and have a right pleasant evening, for all worries had been shaken off.

—Here, gentlemen, the toddy table is ready!

This was accompanied by an animated gesture in the direction of a table with liquors placed in the left corner near the bookshelves. Then he suddenly stopped, just as though he had realized that he had no longer a couple of young students from the seventies before him, who, according to the customs of those days, refreshed themselves with warm toddy:

—. . . Although you, you are going to have grog, of course.

There were plenty of refreshments. We had the choice of whisky, cognac or punch; there was hot water for toddy and cold soda water for grog. In order at least to begin alike, the three of us determined to take whisky grog and accordingly seated ourselves on the three narrow, high-backed dining-room chairs which Strindberg had placed around the table and on which we were forced to sit up straight as in an examination under some supercilious professor.

This does not imply that Strindberg acted the part of a professor. On the other hand, he was the youngest among us, and as soon as we had drunk each other's health, his tongue started to wag.

I had happened to express my surprise that the Intima Theatre did not have the support of a certain great Maecenas to the extent indicated by the rumor.

—Well, just imagine—Strindberg interrupted, delighted to be able to relate something truly interesting—while

Falck and I sat here one evening last fall discussing the question of capital wherewith to run the theatre, I happened to think of him first of all, of him, the patron of art, since I could not but think that he who has done so much for pictorial art might also lend a hand to the much abused dramatic art. But, you would hardly believe it, as soon as I pronounced his name—"bang", a miracle took place.

—A miracle?

—Yes, it is a fact, declared Falck.

—We heard a rumbling noise in the chimney-flue and a moment later a brick came down into the fire-place, blew open the brass-doors, which ought almost to have been an impossibility, and landed on the floor here in the midst of us. Then I knew the reply that we could expect from that man.

—The Maecenas answered in the negative, then?

—Yes, he could neither lend us nor borrow 3000 crowns for us. But just think that a brick can give answer to the mere thinking of something.

We found this advance message of the Powers as well as the refusal of the Maecenas equally wonderful. But we did not know just then that the patron in question was himself in great financial embarrassment at that time.

But it had been possible to start the entire enterprise, thanks to the money that kept pouring in upon Strindberg from all points of the compass. He found it quite as inexplicable as the brick, that as soon as the daily papers announced that his dramas were to be played some-

where, publishers again began to show a willingness to print his works. He published his *Black Flags* at Björk & Börjeson's and *The Blue Books,* for which he thought he would never get a publisher, had been put out by the same firm. Also abroad, especially in Germany and Austria, the interest in him had begun to reawaken and theatres had started to buy his plays.

In the year of 1906 his income had dwindled down to a scanty 4000 crowns, and he had been so hard up that he had wondered whether he could afford to remain in his 800 crowns apartment the following year. But this year, when the theatre was to be started, his income rose just in the nick of time.[1] But this was not altogether too marvellous; when you cut off all communcations with the world, as Strindberg had done in late years, you are soon forgotten, no matter how great your renown has been. Shakespeare, as we know, complains in *The Tempest* that he was unknown to his countrymen a couple of years after he had left his theatre. Rembrandt, who in his time was the most celebrated man in Holland, was so completely forgotten from the time he was forced to sell his palace and his great collections that he was considered as dead. During the last few years of his life, when his art asserted itself more than ever before, that martyr sat in a closet behind his son's little art store and painted, while nobody knew that he was alive.

That a like fate did not befall Strindberg, is due to a certain extent to the theatre.

[1] It appeared later on that Strindberg this year had received about 32,000 crowns, of which sum nearly 19,500 went to the support of the theatre.

From things theatrical we came to other topics, but all of them dealt with mysticism. Strindberg's predilection for the mystical had continued to assert itself with equal tenacity ever since the Inferno-period. This was a mania of his, but it ought not—as has happened in certain instances—to be taken as an indication of a continued state of weakness of this mind which was potent and active in all things pertaining to humanity.

That evening he related a long series of similar experiences, all of which I cannot now remember, but of which the larger number may be classified under the heading: clairvoyance. To show how closely associated he was with his dramatic work he told us, for instance, that as a rule he felt it in his bones when some of his plays were presented for the first time somewhere in Europe. He could smell smoke and spiritous vapors which meant, according to him, that people were discussing him intensely in the lobby of some theatre. After he had gone to bed about ten o'clock and fallen asleep, he would suddenly be aroused by rounds of applause and, frightened, he would sit up in bed, wondering whether he was in the theatre. He did not like to go to his own premières, and applause was as distasteful to him as the literary yelping which had pursued him all his life. But after having experienced such applause, he insisted that he always received intelligence of some dramatic success.

When Strindberg had the opportunity to relate similar incidents and when he had an audience capable of following the creative fancy which coöperated in the telling of the story, he was in his element. He was himself so

intensely absorbed that time and time again his head became too warm. He had to cool off his hot forehead by bathing it for a few seconds with cold water. What he drank, he diluted more and more with water and lemon juice.

After the day's topics of mysticism were exhausted, he threw himself into politics. Then it was the "eagle" within him that rose on proud wings; again he became the critical art-revolutionist of the *Red Room* period, who tore down all idols. He arranged the discussion so that it resembled a great criminal prosecution, where the unjustly accused was his own point of view. The malicious prosecutor pleaded the cause of the plaintiff. Then he himself took the part of counsel for the defense, and after the prosecutor had formulated his charges more or less successfully, the defence began.

And then there was a hot tussle among the shields. After an expository preamble, came proofs of the defence. They came like rattling volleys of machine-gun fire, and for each volley that had mowed down a hostile force, Strindberg cried out: Bang!

He had hit the bull's eye. The chain of proofs had been welded together so firmly that there was nothing more to do in the matter. Bang! Bang!

The entire militant forces of the prosecutor were riddled. Not a single platoon could hold the ground any longer. The accused was completely acquitted of all charges.

Bang!

The judge could do nothing else than dismiss him;

and that too in a manner that afforded even more than redress and gave almost the halo of a saint to the man who had been unjustly accused.

Bang!

The whole matter was closed once for all.

A couple of hours elapsed in this manner. They had passed incredibly fast, and yet it seemed as though we had lived through a series of dramas and novels.

Hundreds of human shapes had filed past the inner vision. Hosts of burning questions of the day the mysterious magician had hung up before our eyes like waving banners, but at the same time in which he had looked at them, they had become torn to shreds by a storm-wind and changed into worthless rags fit for the dump.

Shortly before nine o'clock, some one peeped through the dining-room door. Strindberg raised his glass and invited us to drain the cups.

—Now we are going to have something to eat. I hope the grog has given you an appetite.

With these words he opened the doors to the dining-room. It was beaming with light from the electric chandelier and the candelabra with stearine candles. Before the figure of Buddah there burned a tiny, mysterious lamp.

The table was spread for a feast. The cold table, according to the old-Swedish custom which Strindberg loved, was there, but not the traditional one with sugared herring and the like, only *delikatessen*. Besides, there was a wealth of flowers in small vases placed like

a guard of honor at the end of the table where nobody was to be seated.

It was with real delight that Strindberg sat down as host at this table. He had the ability to get even the least object to shine and to become significant. Without the slightest hint on his part, we understood that he had gone the full length that evening, and that he offered us the best that he had been able to select, in order that we might understand that it was his purpose to prepare a royal feast for us.

Strindberg expressed his joy at being at home again and at being able to enjoy the Swedish table. During the many years abroad, he always suffered because he could not become accustomed to the food. Also in this respect, a man has his roots in his native land. What we become accustomed to while growing up, we must stick to. He had never felt at home in any other place than his beloved Stockholm.

During certain periods of his life, he had been troubled with a bad stomach. He told of such a period that he had passed through in April of that year.[1]

At the time when his drama *The Dream Play* was being rehearsed, a peculiar change had taken place in his every day life. He had had to pass through a period of fasting and brooding which extended over forty days. Six times during that period, he had to change servants, the one proving worse than the other. It went so far that he had to help himself, had to set the table and look after the fires.

[1] See The Blue Book and Supplement pp. 427, 430 and 431.

—At that time I had to eat black hog-wash out of a dish-carrier.

He regarded this fasting of forty days as a punishment for *The Dream Play* which was presumptious and blasphemous in that it tried to give advice to Providence. When he was about to tell his brother Axel that he had received food so unpalatable that he could not thank the Lord for it, he had, however, been prevented from doing so by a blue streak of lightning and a clap of thunder which was repeated three times. Because he had been able to suppress the accusation against the Most High, he had received his reward the following day. It was on the 24th of April of that year that his present first-class housekeeper had commenced to work for him, and from that day there had been order in the house, and daily he had received the best of food that he could wish for.

Everything with which Strindberg treated us that evening was indeed of first-class quality. After the cold table, the housekeeper brought in a splendid lobster; then followed a well-broiled fowl, fruit and cheese.

Nor did we neglect Bacchus. We had Norwegian *aqvavit,* the only dram that Strindberg would take. Then we continued with Burgundy wine. Strindberg had been told by some wine-connoisseur that the consumer should select for himself a brand for which he had developed a taste and then stick to it. He himself had chosen *Beaune* and therefore always received an excellent quality.

Furthermore, he was of the opinion that clarets should not be enjoyed at the temperature of the room. They

should be taken directly out of the cellar when about to be used. For, to anyone blessed with an acute sense of taste, they contained sufficient flavor, and besides that, cold clarets affected the organism more powerfully than when they were warmed.

Strindberg was pure sunshine and joy. It was not only a gay and inspiring banquet at which we were present. In spite of the fact that the table talk moved about material things, trivialities on the whole, but of great significance to a sensitive person like Strindberg, there was a festal atmosphere over us, just as if we had been celebrating a Christmas Eve in memory of some other great man than the one whom we are accustomed to celebrate on the 24th of December,—another, who also had suffered incredible torments for the humanity whose great conscience he had become.

Strindberg's good humor was even more intensified when the banquet was drawing to a close. He then had the chance to relate his little story about the mysticism which enters into the process of coffee-making, one of the themes he loved most of all.—To make coffee is one of the most delicate operations in the world,—that's approximately the way he put it. Servants rarely know how to make what may be called good coffee. You have to do it yourself. I have always made it myself, and so did Balzac while he was working nights.

You see, coffee is a sensitive beverage. It seems it can receive impressions from the state of mind of the person who makes it. If it is a dyspeptic person, the coffee is usually acid. And yet the whole science of

making good coffee consists in careful watching while it is in the process of ebullition. The coffee itself speaks up when it is ready.

After this little lecture, Strindberg got up, fetched matches, and lighted the small spirit lamp under the percolator which stood on the serving table behind him. After that he turned the double utensil upside down with a graceful movement and a skill which indicated that this was a daily performance. Without looking at the apparatus, he again seated himself at the table and entered into the conversation with vivacity. And he feigned he did not notice the boiling which was going on behind him, despite the fact that a certain mental tension rather suggested to us that it was the muttering coffee he listened to and not to his own voice. He spoke under a strain, just as if the contents of what he uttered did not interest him, or as though it had been something committed to memory. And yet it was his own thoughts that he let flow, but thoughts, you might know, which he had repeated to every new guest until they had become something extraneous, mere trifles that he had given away long ago.

Precisely at the right moment he rose again, extinguished the flame, and put the coffee on the table to settle. The coffee which he had made was, indeed, delicious, and he seemed as proud of it as Anders Zorn[1] of his famous cocktail.

After the supper, we again settled down in Strindberg's library. There we found a newly spread table with

[1] A famous Swedish painter.

tonics, etc., and again we sat down on the uncomfortable rattan chairs which obliged us to sit very straight.

It was as though we had left the solemn birthday celebration and moved up to the little student room in Uppsala. Strindberg again entered into the spirit of the young student, related mysterious experiences and offered convincing deductions of evidence, and for every link in the chain that was being forged together, there came that rousing: Bang! Bang!

By degrees he began to drop the thread. He allowed Falck and myself to spin on. He seemed to enter into his own silent thoughts, the contents of which, apparently, he did not wish to impart to anybody. Again he grew hot and had to bathe his temples with cold water.

At times he walked over to the window, opened it a little and became absorbed in the contemplation of the starry heavens. Then he disappeared into the dining-room to which he opened the doors. There we heard him stalk about. Then he returned and sat down beside us. Among other things, he happened to tell about his morning hours at the desk.

—When I have finished my work for the day, I always make a few notes on a piece of paper as to what I am going to commence with the following day. All the long afternoon and evening, I walk about gathering material for the next day's work. During my morning walk, my thoughts are being further condensed, and when I return from my walk, I am fully charged like an electric machine.

After having put on dry clothes, for I always get into

a state of perspiration, I sit down here at my writing table. As soon as I have paper ready, it breaks loose. The words literally swamp me, and the pen works under high pressure in order to get it all on the paper. When I have written for a while, I have a feeling as though I soared in space. Then it seems as if a higher will than my own caused the pen to glide over the paper and made it (the will) record words which appear to me as pure inspiration.

After two or three hours of such ecstatic activity, he had to discontinue in order not to exhaust himself. Inactivity he abhorred, and therefore occupied himself during the rest of the day in every conceivable way. Lately he had provided himself with the Encyclopaedia Britannica, and he studied that work industriously. He also studied languages and mathematics and in the evening the star-studded firmament; not only astronomically, but also as an astrologer. Besides this he wrote letters and recorded the events of the day in his diary.

In order to stretch after having been seated for such a long time, I had risen to my feet and was taking a few steps forward in the room. In so doing, I happened to glance into the sitting-room and what I saw there made me pause in silent admiration.

During the few minutes that Strindberg had been stalking about there the room had been changed. The dining-room table he had transformed into a flower-garden by means of tulips and other flowers. They were all contained in vases of various sizes and were a floral homage to Christmas and the peacefulness of the holiday

season which now began. The white, pink and bronze-yellow tulips formed a gentle accord like the ethereal melody of some of Beethoven's earlier sonatas. And it was noticeable that the loving hand, which had arranged all these flowers in symbolic harmony, had placed them in such a way that they effected a feeling of balance and that the flower-group as a whole gave the impression of an altar.

On another table opposite this altar of yellow and white, was the Buddah statuette with a red light before it, absorbed in such a potent religious hypnosis as though he had been looking back to origin itself.

In order to remove the notion that it was an ordinary room, Strindberg had brought to light his Indian-knitted table cloths of white and pale green silk and spread them over the backs of the chairs. It was not the dwelling of a human being that I was looking into, it was the private sanctuary of one whose devotion lay not only on his lips, but also in the deepest recesses of his soul.

Strindberg smiled in his inimitable, cordial manner at the astonishment that must have been reflected in my features. He walked into the room ahead of me and made a sign for me to follow.

—I am in the habit of coming in here to pray with my flowers, he said.

And with a glance that glided over them all, he gathered in all these bright bells into his soul, just as though he wished that they all might chime in concord with himself.

—You need no words to pray.

He remained for a few moments while this almost audible hymn to the Good and the Beautiful died away within him. He seemed so good, like a child that could see the bright side of life only, this weather-beaten champion with the gray lion's mane, he, who could forget himself so completely and become absorbed in a life as immediate and sublime as that of the flowers.

This image of the aged poet before his altar of flowers absorbed in silent ecstacy, seems to me to prove that Strindberg, in spite of all the hideous and disgusting that life continually poured upon him, had nevertheless been able to guard in his inmost being the sacred flowers of beauty just as uncontaminated as when they grow in a paradise wrought out of the wakeful dreams of a child's soul.

When we said good-night, he stood leaning against the door-post, tired but at the same time happy over an evening in which he had rejoiced, and smiling at us, even in the moment of parting, just as though he had to give a free outlet to the sunshine which glowed within his own soul.

CHAPTER X.

In the Blue Tower

ONE day in the summer of 1908, Strindberg disappeared from the Red House. He moved to a boarding-house, but his address had to be kept secret.

Later on when I met him, I found that he had left his cozy little home at 40 Karlavägen for the most fanciful reasons. The Intima Theatre had got into debt, and as Strindberg's name was on its notes and loans and since, moreover, he had gone surety for the rent, he had become so thoroughly convinced of financial collapse that he daily feared the moment when the servants of the law should seize his home. The thought of the possibility of a warrant of distress being served upon him so disgusted Strindberg, that rather than expose himself to anything of the sort, he left the apartment where he had been so happy during these years.

But the whole danger of seizure was imaginary. None of the creditors of the Intima Theatre had ever thought of this, and its business had been attended to with great energy by director Falck, so that there were no notes due, or anything of the sort on account of which legal measures might have been demanded.

Howere, he had found a temporary asylum in the Blue Tower, as he afterwards called the new quarters. Here he rented three small rooms, and as he looked upon

himself as a bankrupt, he did not dare to bring any of his books or furniture from his former home.

Strindberg was delighted with his new home. He rejoiced because here no bold tool of the office of the Governor-general could force an entrance. He received good, well-prepared food from the *Falkner Pension* one flight up in the same house. And then, besides, he had got away from the things which aroused unpleasant memories of the conjugal life he had led yonder in the Red House.

For a while he rested from his literary activities. But after he had become accustomed to the new surroundings into which he had removed, he began to write again. Within a fortnight he produced a new historical drama *The Last Knight,* and a little later on *The National Director,* which together with *Master Olof* and *Gustavus Vasa* formed a cycle about Gustavus I, his favorite historical character.

The four years which Strindberg passed in the Blue Tower were, generally speaking, among the happiest of his life. His misanthropy had become less pronounced. He felt that he was made much of by those who were nearest to him, he got on comfortably in every respect, and he had the feeling that here he had finally found that *Tusculanum* where he was to be permitted to pass his old age in peace.

He continued to take his long walks at a time of day when he did not have to meet any of his acquaintances. Nowadays he had chosen other routes than those which he walked when he resided on Karlavägen. To his

beloved Djurgarden he came seldom. As a rule he directed his steps via Drottning and Barnhusgatorna to the Intima Theatre at Norra Bantorget.

He had provided himself with his own keys to the theatre, and thus began his day by inspecting it. He had to look over the repertory list, see what plays were to be given during the week, and which one was being rehearsed. He inspected the work in progress on new decorations, especially of those belonging to his great Damascus-cycle which, however, never was acted in its entirety.

And then, when, after completed inspection, he left the theatre, he always stopped in the square to give it a last look of farewell. If the sun was shining on the upper part of the façade, he interpreted this as a good omen.

He continued his walk down Vasagatan. At Tegelbacken he turned to the right and followed the railway bridge, for the huge, wide Vasabron[1] had created a dislike in him, a feeling which was probably founded on some remainder of that fear of the market[2] from which he suffered in the beginning of his Inferno-period.

The unattractive business structure on the little island of Strömsborg is itself capable of creating this feeling of aversion, especially when seen from Vasabron.

On the other hand, one could hardly see anything handsomer than the House of the Peerage,[3] seen from

[1] A bridge connecting the so-called Norrmalm with the city proper.

[2] Strindberg's agoraphobia continued also after the Inferno period. See his Legends.

[3] Riddarhuset.

the railway bridge, and as Strindberg always rejoiced in what afforded impressions of beauty, we can understand his predilection for the route which he had chosen.

Then he wandered farther away across Munkbron or by way of the narrow streets of the city proper towards Slussen (The Sluice Bridges), followed Skeppsbron (The Quay) to Norrbro and Gustaf Adolfs Torg (Gustavus Adolphus Square). He was often seen to pass through Kungsträgarden (King's Garden)[1] about 8.30 in the morning.

During the last few years he continued from this point up to Valhallavägen, for at the farthest end of this street lived his youngest little daughter, of whom he was especially fond because she was like him and because he considered her a visionary (endowed with the power of second sight) even as a child. She used to tell her papa that when she was alone at home and had nobody to play with, little Robin Goodfellow came to keep her company.

Finally Strindberg returned by way of Odengatan and Norrtullsgatan. The latter, of course, he had been walking as a schoolboy, although he did not like the street, but rather chose—if time permitted—some side street that led down to the Clara School.

During the years just preceding his death, Strindberg often took such long morning walks that he became completely exhausted. When he was in that state, he often suffered a slight stroke. His entire side would then become so paralyzed that he moved with difficulty. Then

[1] Extensive public gardens in the vicinity of Gustavus Adolphus Square.

he took a taxicab to his home. The paralysis soon left him.

During the summer of the great strike (1909), he was not able to find any vehicles, and then he had to walk into some store where he made a small purchase and asked to be permitted to rest on a chair for a few minutes until the spell was over and he could continue his way.

The great strike was of the deepest interest to him. One of the few literary plans that he had in mind during 1910—1911 was to depict this great struggle in a fantastic style à la Victor Hugo, to describe its paralyzing effects upon the individual and society.

When I asked him why he did not go to work on this as soon as possible, he answered:

—I do not write anything which does not absolutely call for expression.

Another literary plan which he considered during these years was to dramatize *Black Flags*. The first act was to represent the well-known ghost-dinner at Professor Stenkahl's. But instead of permitting the author, Falkenström, to be in it from the beginning, the dialogue was to be recast so as to treat of him exclusively, and the *dénouement* of the final act was to consist in Falkenberg's reappearance after a long absence among those who had just slandered him. Neither of these plans, presumably, was carried out.

Otherwise Strindberg rarely discussed his plans or the work with which he was occupied. The reason for this was that on the one hand he did not wish to weaken his interest in the subject and break up the mood into which

he had lived himself; on the other hand, to a certain extent, in order not to be robbed of his ideas.

He used to tell of a like case. He had disclosed to a person, whose name I need not mention, the whole outline of a drama which, however, he never had had time to commit to paper. One year later when he visited Stockholm, the friend urged him to come to a *première*. It was Strindberg's play act for act that was being performed. The author got an ovation at the close of the performance, but Strindberg sat there dismal and silent.

—Don't you like the play? asked the acclaimed author.

—Why, it's *my* play you have written! replied Strindberg. The friend only laughed as he would have done at a good joke.

The following seasons, generally speaking, were favorable for the Strindberg Theatre. When it became plain that the enterprise was a fair success and one after the other of Strindberg's plays were acted, his own interest in the enterprise became keener. He was present at dress-rehearsals and ever gave good advice as regards the execution of the parts. In spite of the fact that his advice was not always accepted, he could not but leave a certain impress on the theatre, and the acting was more pronouncedly Strindbergian, generally speaking, than was usually the case in other theatres.

For a time Strindberg interested himself so much in the theatre and the little troupe of young actors, who devoted themselves to his cause, that he invited them to his home to little sprees and from time to time sent them personal letters in which he expressed his opinion in

regard to their work, sometimes in the most enthusiastic terms. As the criticism of daily newspaperdom was generally annihilating, he wanted to strengthen their courage with amiable letters.

Thus at times there was a good deal of gaiety in the home of the old fellow in the Blue Tower. On some rare occasions, he would even break loose and accompany the young people to bowl at the Lidingö Inn. This would be enjoyed until the small hours in the morning, and then they went out for a joy-ride by automobile for the rest of the night. After a nap of a couple of hours, he took his oyster breakfast at the Phoenix.

In spite of his sixty years, Strindberg was thus still a man of vigor. In every day life, he was extremely moderate and careful. At this epoch we could not but believe that he yet had a couple of decades to live and to work among us.

Gradually, however, there were signs of a coming rupture with the Intima Theatre. Strindberg was anxious that certain dramas should be played which Falck, on the other hand, did not dare to put on, on account of possible pecuniary losses. The theatre struggled along thanks to the tours through the provinces with such plays as had scored a success in the capital.

The Link with Miss Flygare as the baroness and *Swan white* with Miss Falkner in the leading part were a success throughout the land. The great success of the last mentioned tour may be attributed in part to a rumor to the effect that the young lady of the leading part was the wife-to-be of the aged poet.

One day of his own accord, Strindberg stated the facts of the case. During the earlier part of his stay in the Blue Tower, he had, in fact, been engaged to Miss Falkner for a few days. But then both of them had found it ridiculous to sport engagement rings, and therefore they had re-exchanged them. But a Platonic friendship continued between the two during the years next following.

After Miss Falkner left the Intima Theatre, the tension between Strindberg and the theatre became more pronounced. It was further intensified when director Falck announced that he intended to take up a different repertory, since in his opinion none of the remaining unplayed Strindberg creations were adapted to his small stage.

The well-known conflict which ensued, ended, as we know, by Strindberg's attacking Falck in such a manner that the latter had to resign and the theatre was forced to shut its doors.

One of the reasons contributing to this bitterness against the theatre in which he had taken so much interest, I believe I have found to be this, that Strindberg was sick and tired of the idea that he should have a theatre of his own, just as he continually grew tired of and trampled under foot all other ideas that he had embraced for a while, and of which he found later on that he had had enough.

A few months before he died, he again became reconciled with Falck and sent him thanks for having so ably and deservedly staged and played so many of his unplayed dramatic works.

In the summer of 1910 Strindberg passed through a peculiar crisis. After a few years of success, he had chanced into a back-current which held him prisoner.

After having been raised aloft the year before by that tempestuous enthusiasm on the part of the Swedish people, which marked his passing of the sixtieth milestone, he was down in the slough again. He was forgotten, his books did not sell, and nobody wanted to play his dramas. His income gradually dwindled away and he himself began to consider in earnest whether he really would have to leave Stockholm.

A change of locality would, no doubt, have proved beneficial to him. But it was difficult for him to decide where he was going. One day it was a sure thing that he would go to see a friend of his who possessed a country estate in the vicinity of Boras.[1] There he was to have a separate cottage at his disposal and there also he would be able to live an out-of-door life. There was a library and people to associate with, and yet he could be entirely by himself, and would not have to be shut up in the house the whole day as in Stockholm but could take a walk in the woods whenever he wanted to do so.

The next day the whole plan was rejected. Then he found a seclusion somewhere near the lake Mälaren where he could spend the rest of his days, be occupied with gardening, live in perfect seclusion and yet be in the vicinity of Stockholm.

[1] A town but a few miles to the east of the city of Gothenburg.

His finances became worse day by day. On several occasions he was without a cent and had to resort to all kinds of measures to get a little money. We tried to sell his dramas, but in Stockholm none of them could be sold on account of the Intima Theatre, and among the more prominent provincial directors of theatres, there was not a single one who wanted them, because Strindberg had permitted a few inferior companies to travel about and give free representations, so that the provincial public would not go to a theatre where Strindberg's name was on the posters.

The only play that he was able to place on the Swedish stage this summer was a dramatization of *The Inhabitants of Hemsö*. It was sold to The Peoples' Theatre in Stockholm and Gothenburg, but in both places the première was a failure because of adverse criticism. It was contended that the play did not compare favorably with the novel and by means of this feint, the critics succeeded in scaring away the public, first in Stockholm and later on, through the amiable imitation of the Stockholm critics, also in Gothenburg.

Nor did Strindberg want to write any more. The year before, in *The Great Highway* he had presented his "self-declaration" and said good-bye to life and his literary activity. He would rather not write anything after this lyric wander-drama.

Yet it would seem that among the great number of literary works of his pen, there might have been some single one fit to be printed once more. But this was a more difficult matter than one would think. *A Fool's*

Confession which he himself had never published in Sweden—a paper by the name of *Budkaflen*[1] had stolen it and published it as a serial—he could have found a publisher for, but out of consideration for his wife, from whom he was divorced, and the children of his first marriage, he did not wish to see the book in print.

Of all of Strindberg's novels, there was no one left but *Black Flags.* After he had reacquired the rights from the publishers Björck & Börjeson, who had printed the first edition, he succeeded in placing this book with the Gothenburg firm Ahlén & Akerlund who published a popular two-crown edition of the work.

Concerning this Strindberg wrote me on the 13th of May. He related that Börjeson would release him from the agreement with regard to *Black Flags* and asked me quietly to get him a publisher in Gothenburg. "In Gothenburg," he writes, "because the Stockholm-Flags will then have less of a chance to interfere." And he continues: "Since the book is to be had in Danish and German, I do not see why it should not be obtainable in Swedish. But on the quiet!"

It is characteristic of the fate of Strindberg that in fear and trembling he should be obliged to publish secretly the only available work through which he might acquire the more indispensable necessities of life. If Ahlén & Akerlund had not dared to take a stand in his favor at this time, the old poet would have had to face dire need—or as he did once before—he would have been forced to sell his property.

[1] The Fiery Cross.

In spite of all these economic difficulties, Strindberg was, however, anything but downcast. Though he often lacked the necessities of life, he wrote day after day gratuitously for *Aftontidningen*[1] and *The Social Democrat.*[2] He was in a fighting mood, and his articles, particularly in the first mentioned paper, caused a great sensation.

On the 25th of June, Strindberg sent me a letter which made me believe that the bomb was about to explode. I must see him immediately, for he "is on the point of emigrating". But he adds: "from Stockholm at least!" At the same time he informs me that his friend from the time of his stay at "The Sign of the Black Pig", Professor Dr. Schleich, is in the city.

But nothing came out of his threatened emigration this time either. Just when Strindberg had decided to pay a visit to Dr. Brand, whose home was in the vicinity of Boras, Dr. Schleich induced him to change his plans and come along to Berlin instead. But as this was too far and moving there called for too much capital, which by the way could not be provided for, the whole plan came to nought once more.

The result was, however, a few joyful days together with the German professor. He took possession of Strindberg in the old student-like way and before they had been together many hours, they were in such a mood that they sang ballads and played the piano.

[1] One of the leading Stockholm dailies.
[2] The organ of the Social Democrats.

Schleich tried the very first day to take Strindberg out to dinner. Strindberg fought against the idea, but finally he had to give in. He was to go to Grand Hotel Royal, where the professor stayed, and they were to take dinner in the large dining-room.

When Strindberg was approaching the hotel, he had unpleasant presentiments. He happened to recall that he had given a farewell dinner in this very place to his third wife, and he had an idea that the professor had chosen the identical table for his dinner at which Strindberg had been seated on that occasion.

Pale as a ghost and deeply moved Strindberg entered the dining-room. Exactly! Scheich was seated at that very table and was waiting for Strindberg. He thought Strindberg had just escaped some serious accident to judge by his facial expression. But neither of them said anything and they ate their dinner in gloom, and Strindberg was not himself again until he got his friend to take an automobile ride with him and when they were by themselves in Strindberg's apartments once more.

The following day I met them both at Strindberg's. The latter insisted that he was going with Schleich to Berlin. He was in the very best frame of mind, felt as he did of yore "Zum Schwarzen Ferkel" and talked about everything between heaven and earth.

He informed me that Schleich had outlined a new philosophy based on their conversation of the times, when they met at "The Sign of the Black Pig." Schleich had found even at that time that Strindberg was the great resistance which broke all electric currents, that only

through resistance which breaks the current can the latter be of practical use and that, consequently, resistance was the principle to which all the functions of life could be referred. The professor had written a great work in several parts on this subject: *Die Philosophie des Wilderstandes* (The Philosophy of Resistance).

All this delighted Strindberg. We got into all kinds of scientific discussions, and the professor reported on the latest scientific results in several different fields.

Among other things Strindberg exhibited a keen curiosity as to the real nature of cancer, the very disease to which he was destined to succumb in less than two years. Schleich declared that the disease in question originated —theoretically speaking—in the following manner: a couple of cells grow tired of the body to which they belong. They try to form a new union, and to this end, the endoplasts force themselves towards the walls of the cells and there enter into an abortive copulation, forming a coalescence of cells which, however, has not the inherent abilities requisite for the formation of a new individual (cell) which is the aim and object of the copulation in question. The reason why the operations on cancerous tumors is a failure in nearly every case and that the disease soon reveals itself again, is this, that from the cell in coalescence a like inclination to copulation is transmitted to adjacent cells. Operations, therefore, never can give permanent relief, the only effective way being to burn away the affected parts with a red hot iron.

—*Ignis purgat*—declared Strindberg, and told in this

connection about the peculiar stomach trouble he had been subject to for a couple of years, and which later was supposed to have been the ulcer of the stomach which in turn is supposed to have caused the cancer that ended Strindberg's life.

But he did not care to enter into details about his sickness. He did not want Dr. Schleich, who is a celebrated surgeon, to have reason to interfere or even attempt to diagnose the case.

A peculiar fact in connection with this matter is, that the disease showed its head shortly after Strindberg had passed through one of his Storm and Stress periods which he closed with a great general resolve—a final balancing up of accounts. After that he was in such a state of mind that he could do nothing else than wait for death, nay, he would even express the desire that it might not be too far off.

That afternoon he explained to Schleich and myself that he suffered terrible torments during these hours of seclusion. Schleich insinuated that he was a self-tormentor without an equal, and to this he agreed.

—Those pains and sufferings which he owed to society were as nothing to those which he owed to himself.

In order to get him away from all this, Schleich wanted to take him along to the mountains immediately and later on to Berlin. But now Strindberg had lost every desire to emigrate. Now he was more attached than ever to the Blue Tower.

The two years preceding the death of Strindberg seem to me altogether too familiar for any discussion on my part.

He had really hoped to receive the *Nobel Prize in literature* one of these years, but he realized the slight probability of this, since, without counting his own enemy who filled the office of secretary, he had decided opponents in the two poets Karlfelt and Hallström, who constituted the literary and anti-Strindberg element in the Swedish Academy.[1]

When the question came up as to the raising of a national fund for Strindberg, he wrote to me about this as early as the 3rd of August 1910:

You must not speak about a "collection" for me who am taxed for such and such an income, but rather about the "founding of an anti-Nobel Prize." That's a different matter. But I'd rather not have any, for half of it, I suppose, will be stolen on the way, and in the end the whole affair will be a fiasco.

This idea of his of an anti-Nobel Prize was not carried out, however, despite the fact that there ought to have been a good reason for it. An anti-Nobel Prize as a protest against the shameless manner in which The Academy distributes prizes would, undoubtedly, have a mission to fulfil in our moral life.

It is quite out of the question that the Swedish Academy ever will be able to reform to such a degree as to become a representative body of Swedish poets. No self-respecting poet can enter this parody on a literary Areopagus, least of all after the treatment Strindberg received from that quarter as well during his life as after

[1] The enemy referred to was Dr. C. D. af Wirsén, (1842-1912), permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy.

his death. Those who do enter prove thereby openly that they have betrayed the high purpose of letters, that humanity's battle for the symbol of the following trinity: Goodness, Justice and Beauty is of indifference to them and that their souls have died the most ignominious death possible—that of self-inflicted sterility.

When Strindberg received his anti-Nobel Prize, he scattered it to the winds, remembering in particular those who are the least favored among us: The Humble. But this does not prevent a new Nobel Prize being founded in his honor in order that unborn generations may remember that the Swedish Academy got an ineffaceable stain on its garment by refusing Sweden's greatest poet the real Nobel Prize.

Strindberg distributed his money among the humble and the working people. An aristocrat by education and refinement, in his old age as well as in his youth he felt a mighty leaning towards the people. The charwoman's son had long stood untouched by the endeavor on the part of the working classes to rise above the abasement of industrial slavery and to attain to an existence more worthy of human beings. Not that he begrudged them this, but because of the fact that it had nothing to do with him personally, for it was his opinion that the poet and the artist stood outside of party-politics.

But when the great contest of strength between labor and capital was over, when the rather too pronounced courage of labor was broken, and when he saw how ruthlessly the conquered masses were treated by those who retained the power, his sympathies turned entirely

to the people and he considered it his duty to act as their spokesman.[1]

This explains the bitter fights he now initiated against those that had been raised highest aloft by the billows of time. He regarded them as idols which had to be destroyed and thought that he did not need to be overscrupulous as regards the means he employed while fighting in such a just cause. The blows he dealt in the wrong direction, we ought to be able to forgive him, knowing as we do that he thought himself to be accomplishing deeds that were pleasing to God.

I met Strindberg for the last time on this last birthday of his when he was publicly honored by the nation.

I found him seated by his desk answering all the congratulations which he had received that morning. He was so scrupulous that he would answer the least, kind word. Among the congratulations that gladdened him most on his sixtieth birthday was a few lines from the landlady's son in Lund, a little fellow who had gone errands for the author.

Our conversation began by a spirited exchange of words concerning a misunderstanding. But when Strindberg realized that his suspicions were unfounded, he again became kind and cheerful, and we had a chat for half an hour—the farewell chat for life.

He dwelled most on his sickness, the pneumonia which he had contracted just on Christmas Eve when he was on his way to his son-in-law, Dr. von Philp and his daugh-

[1] The author here refers to the great strike of 1909, which affected every branch of labor throughout Sweden.

ter Greta—way up on Hornsgatan. He had not been able to find a taxicab at that time in the morning. He had had to walk all the long way, dressed in his fur coat, and had arrived at the house soaking wet with perspiration and completely exhausted.

He described this trip as a real walk to death. While he was advancing slowly across Vasabron, he noticed that it was entirely empty and he was seized with a feeling that something terrible was in the making. This feeling was so intense that he was hardly able to get to the other end of the bridge.

With a certain pride he declared that on the whole he took care of himself while confined to his bed with pneumonia. He had consulted a medical work, and there he had read concerning the disease: Treatment . . . None.

He had cured himself by means of a simple diet, consisting principally of fruit-porridge and milk and an occasional cold rub-down à la Kneipp[1] when there was fever. In spite of having refused restoratives prescribed by Dr. von Philp, he had recuperated in a comparatively short time.

I could not but wonder at the way in which he had regained his former self. On this his red letter day, he seemed to be just as vigorous and sound as when he lived in the Red House. But his statements disclosed a peculiarly set opinion as regards the methods for the treatment of the disease; it seemed as though it displeased him to regain his health. If he had been permitted to die of pneu-

[1] A physician, founder of the so-called Kneipp cure.

monia, which is a rather painless death, he would have been spared many horrible sufferings. But it was his *Karma* that his suffering, not only mentally but also physically, should exceed that of most other human beings.

I'll not let go thy hand, Eternal One,
Thy mighty hand, until I'm blessed by Thee!
Bless me,—who suffers, suffers from thy gift of life!
Me first, who suffered most—

This was Strindberg's own farewell to his literary career and to life, his closing words in *The Great Highway*.

Our conversation was suddenly interrupted by an impudent beggar, who posed as an old acquaintance of Strindberg's, forcing an entrance into the house regardless of the fact that old *Mina*[1] tried to check him. I had to go out and put this professional beggar to flight. He declared that while his old friend Strindberg celebrated his birthday, he ought to consider that the poor fellows also were entitled to a little pleasure that day.

When I came in again, the housekeeper had served Strindberg's breakfast. I could, therefore, do nothing but say good-by, for I knew that he was afraid of inviting me to partake of his table. Once during the summer of 1908 he had invited me to dinner, but that day it happened that we got such poor food that we could hardly eat it and had to wash it down with aqvavit and absinth.

We shook hands for the last time in life. He was cheerful in the consciousness of the fact that he had a day

[1] Strindberg's housekeeper.

of good will before him. His daughter Greta told me afterwards that she never had seen her father so beaming as on that day. His own sun, which he bore within him, shone for a moment before the great darkness was to come.

For a couple of years Strindberg had suffered from some internal disorder which at first was supposed to be an ulcer of the stomach, but which later showed clear symptoms of cancer. Weakened as he was even now after the attack of pneumonia in January, he had little power of resistance when the cancer broke out in the middle of March with serious formations of tumors and water in the stomach.

It was plain at once that the disease would prove fatal and that there was no hope. All that could be done was to alleviate his sufferings until the end should come.

This man whose entire life had been one long series of sufferings over and above all human measure of affliction, was not, strange to say, permitted to close his life otherwise than in the most excruciating pain. During the two months preceding his death, he suffered the most inhuman torments, in spite of the use of anaesthetics. He was unwilling to be relieved of them by radium treatment, for he "did not believe in radium." Besides, he thought that the sufferings belonged to the disease and that, preferably, they were to be endured without the hypodermic injection of morphine.

Towards the end he received word from Helsingfors to the effect that his first wife, *née* Siri von Essen, had died. The last time he could leave his bed and dress was

on the occasion of her burial here in Stockholm. He dressed in black on that day, and it was the last time that he was on his feet.

Terribly emaciated he lay there on his death-bed, enduring his sufferings with true heroism and abiding that deliverance for which he had longed continually during the last four years. When he felt that the vital powers began to fail him and that his strong, clear brain would, before long, be enveloped in the mist of eternal sleep, he said good-by to life with these words:

My life's accounts are closed. Everything personal is now obliterated.

Thereupon he took into his hands the old Bible which lay continually on the table by the bed-side.

This alone is right. Now I say nothing more.

And yet, he still had several days of suffering during which he did not speak with his children, who kept watch by the death-bed. When he regained consciousness from time to time and when his sufferings ceased for a moment, he only pronounced their names.

On the 13th of May, all of them had formed a circle about him from early in the morning, expecting that death would come. The pulse ceased to beat, but his heart kept him alive, and in spite of the intensified sufferings, he endured another twenty-four hours. On the 14th of May about 4.30 in the afternoon, at a time when all had left him, his life's flame flickered and went out.

For those who loved him and who always admired his lofty genius, which, in spite of all its revolutionary tendencies, was his; for us who bow before him as the

Self-redeemer and Self-deliverer, there is one farewell-word which, beaming more brightly than anything else, consoles us in our grief:

Now everything personal is obliterated.

Thus at the moment when he was passing beyond, it was clear to him that the personal element, for which he had fought all his life, did not exist beyond the gates whence no one ever returns. He had the courage to confess this, in spite of the fact that Death, The Reaper, had already taken his position at the pillow. The personal element, which through him had won such glorious victories, was only to be found in the works which he had left behind.

It was as if he had wished to blot out his physical existence with these words in order that his eternal *ego* might live among us with a much higher and clearer flame.

No dogma-lisping *bonze*[1] can come hereafter and claim Strindberg as "the obedient son of the only true church". He himself was too close to the Eternal Source to be classified among those who endeavor to make people believe that there is something wherewith to quench one's thirst in wells whose springs have long ago run dry.

Through burning hot deserts he led us to the boundaries of the New Land of Promise. Anyone who wishes may enter it.

On the 19th day of May (Sunday) early in the morning, all the Stockholm bourgeoisie gathered outside of

[1] The name of Chinese and Japanese priests of the religion of Foh or Buddha.

the Blue Tower in order to accompany Sweden's greatest prophet and poet to the place where he was destined to return to earth again. It was the artists and the deeper strata who had put in an appearance, those whom he had always loved just as ardently as he had hated the human automatons in whom the truly human is blotted out or obscured. It was those who had known his large, warm, incorruptible heart vibrating with love—those it was who came to follow him on his last morning journey.

He was lowered into the earth without any other words than those which he himself had drawn out of the great Source of consolation to which, in his despair, he had been obliged to take refuge.

He was honored with flowers by the various strata of society, from the King and the Privy Council to the poorest and most forgotten. He was honored with standards which, in deep silence, were lowered into the grave. And—in order that everything should be in keeping with the inexorable fate which had pursued him continually—Sunday picnickers were not prevented from plundering his grave and from tearing to pieces the symbols of popular homage which adorned his last resting-place.

But the homage that posterity will lavish upon him, no profane hands will be able to destroy.

THE END

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Note.—In the Albert Bonnier catalogue, No. 6, 1913-1917, published 1918, the following note occurs at this point:

Those parts of August Strindberg's Complete Works not yet (1918) ready, will probably comprise:

" XLV. Five Chamber Plays. (These plays are: Storm. The Burned Lot. The Spook Sonata. The Pelican. The Black Glove.)

" XLVI. Blue Books.

" XLVII. Blue Books.

" XLVIII. Blue Books.

" XLIX. The Last Knight. The National Director. The Earl of Bjälbo.

" L. The Great Highway. The Slippers of Abu Casem.

Vol. LI. Scientific Essays and Articles
" LII. written after 1900. These volumes will contain Dramaturgy: Hamlet. Julius Caesar. Memorandum to the Members of the Intima Theatre. Macbeth and other plays by Shakespeare. An open letter to the Intima Theatre.
Philology, etc. The Origins of our Mother Tongue. Biblical Proper Names. Roots of World Languages. Speeches to the Swedish Nation. The State of the People. Religious Renaissance. China and Japan.
" LIII. Last Works.

NOTE.—In this bibliography, no attempt has been made to specify the contents of each volume. Readers who may desire such information are referred to Albert Bonnier's catalogue No. 6, which may be obtained from the Albert Bonnier Publishing House, 561 Third Avenue, New York, N. Y.

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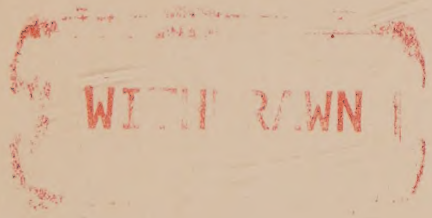

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